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THE

CHAPLET OF PEARLS;

OR,

THE WHITE AND BLACK RIBAUMONT.

THE

CHAPLET OF PEARLS:

OR

THE WHITE AND BLACK RIBAUMONT.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1868.

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PREFACE.

It is the fashion to call every story controversial that deals with times when controversy or a war of religion was raging; but it should be remembered that there are some which only attempt to portray human feelings as affected by the events that such warfare occasioned. "Old Mortality" and "Woodstock" are not controversial tales, and the "Chaplet of Pearls" is so quite as little. It only aims at drawing certain scenes and certain characters as the convulsions of the sixteenth century may have affected them, and is, in fact, like all historical romance, the shaping of the conceptions that the imagination must necessarily form when dwelling upon the records of history. That faculty which might be called the passive fancy, and might almost be described in Portia's song,—

> "It is engendered in the eyes,
> By *reading* fed—and there it dies,"—

that faculty, I say, has learnt to feed upon character and incident, and to require that the latter should be effective and exciting. Is it not reasonable to seek for this in the days when such things were not infrequent, and did not

imply exceptional wickedness or misfortune in those engaged in them? This seems to me one plea for historical novel, to which I would add the opportunity that it gives for study of the times and delineation of characters. Shakespeare's Henry IV. and Henry V., Scott's Louis XI., Manzoni's Federigo Borromeo, Bulwer's Harold, James's Philip Augustus, are all real contributions to our comprehension of the men themselves, by calling the chronicles and memoirs into action. True, the picture cannot be exact, and is sometimes distorted —nay, sometimes praiseworthy efforts at correctness in the detail take away whatever might have been lifelike in the outline. Yet, acknowledging all this, I must still plead for the tales that presumptuously deal with days gone by, as enabling the young to realize history vividly—and, what is still more desirable, requiring an effort of the mind which to read of modern days does not. The details of Millais' Inquisition or of his Huguenot may be in error in spite of all his study and diligence, but they have brought before us for ever the horrors of the auto-da-fé, and the patient, steadfast heroism of the man who can smile aside his wife's endeavour to make him tacitly betray his faith to save his life. Surely it is well, by pen as by picture, to go back to the past for figures that will stir the heart like these, even though the details be as incorrect as those of the revolt of Liège or of La Ferrette in Quentin Durward and Anne of Geierstein.

Scott, however, wilfully carved history to suit the purposes of his story; and in these days we have come to feel that a story must earn a certain amount of credibility by being in keeping with established facts, even if striking events have to be sacrificed, and that the order of time must

be preserved. In Shakespeare's days, or even in Scott's, it might have been possible to bring Henry III. and his mignons to due punishment within the limits of a tale beginning with the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; but in 1868 the broad outlines of tragedy must be given up to keep within the bounds of historical verity.

How far this has been done, critics better read than myself must decide. I have endeavoured to speak fairly, to the best of my ability, of such classes of persons as fell in with the course of the narrative, according to such lights as the memoirs of the time afford. The Convent is scarcely a *class* portrait, but the condition of it seems to be justified by hints in the Port Royal memoirs, respecting Maubuisson and others which Mère Angélique reformed. The intolerance of the ladies at Montauban is described in Madame Duplessis-Mornay's life; and if Berenger's education and opinions are looked on as not sufficiently alien from Roman Catholicism, a reference to Froude's "History of Queen Elizabeth" will show both that the customs of the elder English Church were still kept up by many of the country clergy, and likewise that a broad distinction was made by the better informed among the French between Calvinism and Protestantism or Lutheranism, in which they included Anglicanism. The minister Gardon I do not consider as representing his class. He is a *possibility* modified to serve the purposes of the story.

Into historical matters, however, I have only entered so far as my story became involved with them. And here I have to apologize for a few blunders, detected too late for alteration even in the volumes. Sir Francis Walsingham

was a young rising statesman in 1572, instead of the elderly sage he is represented; his daughter Frances was a mere infant, and Sir Philip Sidney was not knighted till much later. For the rest, I have tried to show the scenes that shaped themselves before me as carefully as I could; though of course they must be not a presentiment of the times themselves, but of my notion of them.

C. M. YONGE.

November 14*th*, 1868.

ERRATUM.

Vol. i. p. 185, line 11, *for* "Amen" *read* "Anan."

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THE CHAPLET OF PEARLS;

OR,

THE WHITE AND BLACK RIBAUMONT.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDAL OF THE WHITE AND BLACK.

"Small was the ring, and small in truth the finger:
What then? the faith was large that dropped it down."
AUBREY DE VERE, *Infant Bridal.*

SETTING aside the consideration of the risk, the baby-weddings of the Middle Ages must have been very pretty sights.

So the Court of France thought the bridal of Henri Béranger Eustache de Ribaumont and of Marie Eustacie Rosalie de Ribaumont du Nid-de-Merle, when, amid the festivals that accompanied the signature of the treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, good-natured King Henri II. presided merrily at the union of the little pair, whose united ages did not reach ten years.

There they stood under the portal of Notre-Dame, the little bridegroom in a white velvet coat, with puffed sleeves, slashed with scarlet satin, as were the short, also puffed

breeches meeting his long white knitted silk stockings some way above the knee; large scarlet rosettes were in his white shoes, a scarlet knot adorned his little sword, and his velvet cap of the same colour bore a long white plume, and was encircled by a row of pearls of priceless value. They are no other than that garland of pearls which, after a night of personal combat before the walls of Calais, Edward III. of England took from his helmet and presented to Sir Eustache de Ribaumont, a knight of Picardy, bidding him say everywhere that it was a gift from the King of England to the bravest of knights.

The precious heirlooms were scarcely held with the respect due to an ornament so acquired. The manly garb for the first time assumed by his sturdy legs, and the possession of the little sword, were evidently the most interesting parts of the affair to the youthful husband, who seemed to find in them his only solace for the weary length of the ceremony. He was a fine, handsome little fellow, fair and rosy, with bright blue eyes, and hair like shining flax, unusually tall and strong-limbed for his age; and as he gave his hand to his little bride, and walked with her under a canopy up to kneel at the High Altar, for the marriage blessing and the mass, they looked like a full-grown couple seen through a diminishing-glass.

The little bride was perhaps a less beautiful child, but she had a splendid pair of black eyes, and a sweet little mouth, both set into the uncomprehending solemnity of baby gravity and contentment in fine clothes. In accordance with the vow indicated by her name of Marie, her dress was white and blue, turquoise forget-me-nots bound the little lace veil on her dark chestnut hair, the bosom of her white satin dress was sprinkled with the same azure jewel, and turquoises bordered every seam of the sweeping skirt with a train befitting

a count's daughter, and meandered in gorgeous constellations round the hem. The little thing lisped her own vows forth without much notion of their sense, and indeed was sometimes prompted by her bridesmaid cousin, a pretty little girl a year older, who thrust in her assistance so glibly that the King, as well as others of the spectators, laughed, and observed that she would get herself married to the boy instead of her cousin.

There was, however, to be no doubt nor mistake about Béranger and Eustacie de Ribaumont being man and wife. Every ceremony, religious or domestic, that could render a marriage valid, was gone through with real earnestness, although with infinite gaiety, on the part of the court. Much depended on their union, and the reconcilement of the two branches of the family had long been a favourite scheme of King Henri II.

Both alike were descended from Anselme de Ribaumont, renowned in the first Crusade, and from the brave Picard who had received the pearls; but, in the miserable anarchy of Charles VI.'s reign, the elder brother had been on the Burgundian side—like most of the other nobles of Picardy—and had thus been brought into the English camp, where, regarding Henry V. as lawfully appointed to the succession, and much admiring him and his brother Bedford, he had become an ardent supporter of the English claim. He had married an English lady, and had received the grant of the castle of Leurre in Normandy by way of compensation for his ancestral one of Ribaumont in Picardy, which had been declared to be forfeited by his treason, and seized by his brother.

This brother had always been an Armagnac, and had risen and thriven with his party,—before the final peace between France and England obliged the elder line to submit

to Charles VII. Since that time there had been a perpetual contention as to the restitution of Château Ribaumont, a strife which under Louis XI. had become an endless lawsuit; and in the days of duelling had occasioned a good many insults and private encounters. The younger branch, or Black Ribaumonts, had received a grant from Louis XI. of the lands of Nid-de-Merle, belonging to an unfortunate Angevin noble, who had fallen under the royal displeasure, and they had enjoyed court favour up to the present generation, when Henri II., either from opposition to his father, instinct for honesty, or both, had become a warm friend to the gay and brilliant young Baron de Ribaumont, head of the white or elder branch of the family.

The family contention seemed likely to wear out of its own accord, for the Count de Ribaumont was an elderly and childless man, and his brother, the Chevalier de Ribaumont, was, according to the usual lot of French juniors, a bachelor, so that it was expected that the whole inheritance would centre upon the elder family. However, to the general surprise, the Chevalier late in life married, and became the father of a son and daughter; but soon after calculations were still more thrown out by the birth of a little daughter in the old age of the Count.

Almost from the hour in which her sex was announced, the King had promised the Baron de Ribaumont that she should be the wife of his young son, and that all the possessions of the house should be settled upon the little couple, engaging to provide for the Chevalier's disappointed heir in some commandery of a religious order of knighthood.

The Baron's wife was English. He had, when on a visit to his English kindred, entirely turned the head of the lovely Annora Walwyn, and finding that her father, one of the gravest of Tudor statesmen, would not hear of her breaking

her engagement to the honest Dorset squire Marmaduke Thistlewood, he had carried her off by a stolen marriage and *coup de main*, which, as her beauty, rank, and inheritance were all considerable, had won him great reputation at the gay court of Henri II.

Infants as the boy and girl were, the King had hurried on their marriage to secure its taking place in the lifetime of the Count. The Countess had died soon after the birth of the little girl, and if the arrangement were to take effect at all, it must be before she should fall under the guardianship of her uncle, the Chevalier. Therefore the King had caused her to be brought up from the cottage in Anjou, where she had been nursed, and in person superintended the brilliant wedding. He himself led off the dance with the tiny bride, conducting her through its mazes with fatherly kindliness and condescension; but Queen Catherine, who was strongly in the interests of the Angevin branch, and had always detested the Baron as her husband's intimate, excused herself from dancing with the bridegroom. He therefore fell to the share of the Dauphiness Queen of Scots, a lovely, bright-eyed, laughing girl, who so completely fascinated the little fellow, that he convulsed the court by observing that he should not have objected to be married to some one like her, instead of a little baby like Eustacie.

Amid all the mirth, it was not only the Chevalier and the Queen who bore displeased looks. In truth, both were too great adepts in court life to let their dissatisfaction appear. The gloomiest face was that of him whose triumph it was—the bridegroom's father, the Baron de Ribaumont. He had suffered severely from the sickness that prevailed in St. Quentin, when in the last August the Admiral de Coligny had been besieged there by the Spaniards, and all agreed that he had never been the same man since, either in health or in

demeanour. When he came back from his captivity and found the King bent on crowning his return by the marriage of the children, he had hung back, spoken of scruples about such unconscious vows, and had finally only consented under stress of the personal friendship of the King, and on condition that he and his wife should at once have the sole custody of the little bride. Even then he moved about the gay scene with so distressed and morose an air that he was evidently either under the influence of a scruple of conscience or of a foreboding of evil.

No one doubted that it had been the latter, when, three days later, Henri II., in the prime of his strength and height of his spirits, encountered young Des Lorges in the lists, received the splinter of a lance in his eye, and died two days afterwards.

No sooner were his obsequies over than the Baron de Ribaumont set off with his wife and the little bridal pair for his castle of Leurre, in Normandy, nor was he ever seen at court again.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEPARATION.

"Parted without the least regret,
Except that they had ever met.
* * * *
Misses, the tale that I relate,
This lesson seems to carry :
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry !"

COWPER, *Pairing Time anticipated.*

"I WILL have it !"

"Thou shalt not have it !"

"Diane says it is mine."

"Diane knows nothing about it."

"Gentlemen always yield to ladies."

"Wives ought to mind their husbands."

"Then I will not be thy wife."

"Thou canst not help it."

"I will. I will tell my father what M. le Baron reads and sings, and then I know he will."

"And welcome."

Eustacie put out her lip, and began to cry.

The "husband and wife," now eight and seven years old, were in a large room hung with tapestry, representing the history of Tobit. A great state bed, curtained with piled velvet, stood on a sort of daïs at the further end; there was a toilet-table adorned with curiously shaped boxes, and

coloured Venetian glasses, and filagree pouncet-boxes, and with a small mirror whose frame was inlaid with gold and ivory. A large coffer, likewise inlaid, stood against the wall, and near it a cabinet, of Dutch workmanship, a combination of ebony, ivory, wood, and looking-glass, the centre retreating, and so arranged that by the help of most ingenious attention to perspective and reflection, it appeared like the entrance to a magnificent miniature cinque-cento palace, with steps up to a vestibule paved in black and white lozenges, and with three endless corridors diverging from it. So much for show; for use, this palace was a bewildering complication of secret drawers and pigeon-holes, all depending indeed upon one tiny gold key; but unless the use of that key were well understood, all it led to was certain outer receptacles of fragrant Spanish gloves, knots of ribbon, and kerchiefs strewn over with rose leaves and lavender. However, Eustacie had secured the key, and was now far beyond these mere superficial matters. Her youthful lord had just discovered her mounted on a chair, her small person decked out with a profusion of necklaces, jewels, bracelets, chains, and rings; and her fingers, as well as they could under their stiffening load, were opening the very penetralia of the cabinet, the inner chamber of the hall, where lay a case adorned with the Ribaumont arms, and containing the far-famed chaplet of pearls. It was almost beyond her reach, but she had risen on tip-toe, and was stretching out her hand for it, when he, springing behind her on the chair, availed himself of his superior height and strength to shut the door of this arcanum and turn the key. His mortifying permission to his wife to absent herself arose from pure love of teasing, but the next moment he added, still holding his hand on the key—"As to telling what my father reads, that would be treason. How shouldst thou know what it is?"

"Dost thou think everyone is an infant but thyself?"

"But who told thee that to talk of my father's books would get him into trouble?" continued the boy, as they still stood together on the high heavy wooden chair.

She tossed her pretty head, and pretended to pout.

"Was it Diane? I will know. Didst thou tell Diane?"

Instead of answering, now that his attention to the key was relaxed, Eustacie made a sudden dart, like a little wild cat, at the back of the chair and at the key. The chair overbalanced; Béranger caught at the front drawer of the cabinet, which, unlocked by Eustacie, came out in his hand, and chair, children, drawer, and curiosities all went rolling over together on the floor with a hubbub that brought all the household together, exclaiming and scolding. Madame de Ribaumont's displeasure at the rifling of her hoards knew no bounds; Eustacie, by way of defence, shrieked "like twenty demons;" Béranger, too honourable to accuse her, underwent the same tempest; and at last both were soundly rapped over the knuckles with the long handle of Madame's fan, and consigned to two separate closets, to be dealt with on the return of M. le Baron, while Madame returned to her embroidery, lamenting the absence of that dear little Diane, whose late visit at the chateau had been marked by such unusual tranquillity between the children.

Béranger, in his dark closet, comforted himself with the shrewd suspicion that his father was so employed as not to be expected at home till supper time, and that his mother's wrath was by no means likely to be so enduring as to lead her to make complaints of the prisoners; and when he heard a trampling of horses in the court, he anticipated a speedy release and summons to show himself to the visitors. He waited long, however, before he heard the pattering of little

feet; then a stool scraped along the floor, the button of his door was undone, the stool pushed back, and as he emerged, Eustacie stood before him with her finger to her lip. "*Chut*, Béranger! It is my father and uncle, and Narcisse, and, oh! so many *gens d'armes*. They are come to summon M. le Baron to go with them to disperse the *prêche* by the Bac de l'Oie. And oh, Béranger, is he not there?"

"I do not know. He went out with his hawk, and I do not think he could have gone anywhere else. Did they say so to my mother?"

"Yes; but she never knows. And oh, Béranger, Narcisse told me—ah, was it to tease me?—that Diane has told them all they wanted to know, for that they sent her here on purpose to see if we were not all Huguenots."

"Very likely, the little viper! Let me pass, Eustacie. I must go and tell my father."

"Thou canst not get out that way; the court is full of men-at-arms. Hark, there's Narcisse calling me. He will come after me."

There was not a moment to lose. Béranger flew along a corridor, and down a narrow winding stair, and across the kitchen; then snatching at the arm of a boy of his own age whom he met at the door, he gasped out, "Come and help me catch Follet, Landry!" and still running across an orchard, he pulled down a couple of apples from the trees, and bounded into a paddock where a small rough Breton pony was feeding among the little tawny Norman cows. The animal knew his little master, and trotted towards him at his call of "Follet, Follet. Now be a wise Follet, and play me no tricks. Thou and I, Follet, shall do good service, if thou wilt be steady."

Follet made his advances, but with a coquettish eye and look, as if ready to start away at any moment.

"Soh, Follet. I have no bread for thee, only two apples; but, Follet, listen. There's my *beau-père* the Count, and the Chevalier, all spite, and their whole troop of savage *gens d'armes*, come out to fall upon the poor Huguenots, who are doing no harm at all, only listening to a long dull sermon. And I am much afraid my father is there, for he went out with his hawk on his wrist, and he never does take Ysonde for any real sport, as thou and I would do, Follet. He says it is all vanity of vanities. But thou know'st, if they caught him at the *prêche* they would call it heresy and treason, and all sorts of horrors, and any way they would fall like demons on the poor Huguenots, Jacques and all—thine own Jacques, Follet. Come, be a loyal pony, Follet. Be at least as good as Eustacie."

Follet was evidently attentive to this peroration, turning round his ear in a sensible attitude, and advancing his nose to the apples. As Béranger held them out to him, the other boy clutched his shaggy forelock so effectually that the start back did not shake him off, and the next moment Béranger was on his back.

"And I, Monsieur, what shall I do?"

"Thou, Landry? I know. Speed like a hare, lock the avenue gate, and hide the key. That will delay them a long time. Off now, Follet."

Béranger and Follet understood one another far too well to care about such trifles as saddle and bridle, and off they went through green grassy baulks dividing the fields, or across the stubble, till, about three miles from the castle, they came to a narrow valley, dipping so suddenly between the hills that it could hardly have been suspected by one unaware of its locality, and the sides were dotted with copse wood, which entirely hid the bottom. Béranger guided his pony to a winding path that led down the steep side of the

valley, already hearing the cadence of a loud, chanting voice, throwing out its sounds over the assembly, whence arose assenting hums over an undercurrent of sobs, as though the excitable French assembly were strongly affected.

The thicket was so close that Béranger was almost among the congregation before he could see more than a passing glimpse of a sea of heads. Stout, ruddy, Norman peasants, and high white-capped women, mingled with a few soberly-clad townsfolk, almost all with the grave, stedfast cast of countenance imparted by unresisted persecution, stood gathered round the green mound that served as a natural pulpit for a Calvinist minister, who wore the dress of a burgher, but entirely black. To Béranger's despair, he was in the act of inviting his hearers to join with him in singing one of Marot's psalms; and the boy, eager to lose not a moment, grasped the skirt of the outermost of the crowd. The man, an absorbed-looking stranger, merely said, "Importune me not, child."

"Listen!" said Béranger; "it imports——"

"Peace," was the stern answer; but a Norman farmer looked round at that moment, and Béranger exclaimed, "Stop the singing! The *gens d'armes!*" The psalm broke off; the whisper circulated; the words "from Leurre" were next conveyed from lip to lip, and, as it were in a moment, the dense human mass had broken up and vanished, stealing through the numerous paths in the brushwood, or along the brook, as it descended through tall sedges and bulrushes. The valley was soon as lonely as it had been populous; the pulpit remained a mere mossy bank, more suggestive of fairy dances than of Calvinist sermons, and no one remained on the scene save Béranger with his pony, Jacques the groom, a stout farmer, the preacher, and a tall thin figure in the

plainest dark cloth dress that could be worn by a gentleman, a hawk on his wrist.

"Thou here, my boy!" he exclaimed, as Béranger came to his side; and as the little fellow replied in a few brief words, he took him by the hand, and said to the minister, "Good Master Isaac, let me present my young son to you, who under Heaven hath been the means of saving many lives this day."

Maître Isaac Gardon, a noted preacher, looked kindly at the boy's fair face, and said, "Bless thee, young sir. As thou hast been already a chosen instrument to save life, so mayest thou be ever after a champion of the truth."

"Monsieur le Baron," interposed Jacques, "it were best to look to yourself. I already hear sounds upon the wind."

"And you, good sir?" said the Baron.

"I will see to him," said the farmer, grasping him as a sort of property. "M. le Baron had best keep up the beck. Out on the moor there he may fly the hawk, and that will best divert suspicion."

"Farewell, then," said the Baron, wringing the minister's hand, and adding, almost to himself, "Alas! I am weary of these shifts!" and weary indeed he seemed, for as the ground became so steep that the beck danced noisily down its channel, he could not keep up the needful speed, but paused, gasping for breath, with his hand on his side. Béranger was off his pony in an instant, assuring Follet that it ought to be proud to be ridden by his father, and exhaling his own exultant feelings in caresses to the animal as it gallantly breasted the hill. The little boy had never been so commended before! He loved his father exceedingly; but the Baron, while ever just towards him, was grave and strict to a degree that the ideas even of the sixteenth century regarded as severe. Little Eustacie with

her lovely face, her irrepressible saucy grace and audacious coaxing, was the only creature to whom he ever showed much indulgence and tenderness, and even that seemed almost against his will and conscience. His son was always under rule, often blamed, and scarcely ever praised; but it was a hardy vigorous nature, and respectful love throve under the system that would have crushed or alienated a different disposition. It was not till the party had emerged from the wood upon a stubble field, where a covey of partridges flew up, and to Béranger's rapturous delight furnished a victim for Ysonde, that M. de Ribaumont dismounted from the pony, and walking towards home, called his son to his side, and asked him how he had learnt the intentions of the Count and the Chevalier. Béranger explained how Eustacie had come to warn him, and also told what she had said of Diane de Ribaumont, who had lately, by her father's request, spent a few weeks at the chateau with her cousins.

"My son," said the Baron, "it is hard to ask of babes caution and secrecy; but I must know from thee what thy cousin may have heard of our doings?"

"I cannot tell, father," replied Béranger; "we played more than we talked. Yet, Monsieur, you will not be angry with Eustacie if I tell you what she said to me to-day?"

"Assuredly not, my son."

"She said that her father would take her away if he knew what M. le Baron read, and what he sung."

"Thou hast done well to tell me, my son. Thinkest thou that this comes from Diane, or from one of the servants?"

"Oh, from Diane, my father; none of the servants would dare to say such a thing."

"It is as I suspected then," said the Baron. "That child

was sent amongst us as a spy. Tell me, Béranger, had she any knowledge of our intended journey to England?"

"To England! But no, father, I did not even know it was intended. To England—to that Walwyn which my mother takes such pains to make us speak rightly. Are we, then, going?"

"Listen, my son. Thou hast to-day proved thyself worthy of trust, and thou shalt hear. My son, ere yet I knew the truth I was a reckless disobedient youth, and I bore thy mother from her parents in England without their consent. Since, by Heaven's grace, I have come to a better mind, we have asked and obtained their forgiveness, and it has long been their desire to see again their daughter and her son. Moreover, since the accession of the present Queen, it has been a land where the light is free to shine forth; and though I verily believe what Maître Gardon says, that persecution is a blessed means of grace, yet it is grievous to expose one's dearest thereto when they are in no state to count the cost. Therefore would I thither convey you all, and there amid thy mother's family would we openly abjure the errors in which we have been nurtured. I have already sent to Paris to obtain from the Queen-mother the necessary permission to take my family to visit thy grandfather, and it must now be our endeavour to start immediately on the receipt of the reply, before the Chevalier's information can lead to any hindrance or detention of Eustacie."

"Then Eustacie will go with us, Monsieur?"

"Certainly. Nothing is more important than that her faith should be the same as yours! But discretion, my son: not a word to the little one."

"And Landry, father? I had rather Landry went than Eustacie. And Follet, dear father, pray take him."

After M. de Ribaumont's grave confidence to his son and heir, he was a little scandalized at the comparative value that the boy's voice indicated for wife, foster-brother, and pony, and therefore received it in perfect silence, which silence continued until they reached the chateau, where the lady met them at the door with a burst of exclamations.

"Ah, there you are, safe, my dear Baron. I have been in despair. Here were the Count and his brother come to call on you to join them in dispersing a meeting of those poor Huguenots, and they would not permit me to send out to call you in! I verily think they suspected that you were aware of it."

M. de Ribaumont made no answer, but sat wearily down and asked for his little Eustacie.

"Little vixen!" exclaimed the Baroness, "she is gone; her father took her away with him." And as her husband looked extremely displeased, she added that Eustacie had been meddling with her jewel cabinet and had been put in penitence. Her first impulse on seeing her father had been to cling to him and pour out her complaints, whereupon he had declared that he should take her away with him at once, and had in effect caused her pony to be saddled, and he had ridden away with her to his old tower, leaving his brother, the Chevalier, to conduct the attack on the Huguenot conventicle.

"He had no power or right to remove her," said the Baron. "How could you let him do so in my absence? He had made over her wardship to me, and has no right to resume it!"

"Well, perhaps I might have insisted on his waiting till your return; but, you see, the children have never done anything but quarrel and fight, and always by Eustacie's fault; and if ever they are to endure each other, it must be by being separated now."

"Madame," said the Baron gravely, "you have done your utmost to ruin your son's chances of happiness."

That same evening arrived the King's passport permitting the Baron de Ribaumont and his family to pay a visit to his wife's friends in England. The next morning the Baron was summoned to speak to one of his farmers, a Huguenot, who had come to inform him that, through the network of intelligence kept up by the members of the persecuted faith, it had become known that the Chevalier de Ribaumont had set off for court that night, and there was little doubt that his interference would lead to an immediate revocation of the sanction to the journey, if to no severer measures. At best, the Baron knew that if his own absence were permitted, it would be only on condition of leaving his son in the custody of either the Queen-mother or the Count. It had become impossible to reclaim Eustacie. Her father would at once have pleaded that she was being bred up in Huguenot errors. All that could be done was to hasten the departure ere the royal mandate could arrive. A little Norman sailing vessel was moored two evenings after in a lonely creek on the coast, and into it stepped M. de Ribaumont, with his Bible, Marot's Psalter, and Calvin's works, Béranger still tenderly kissing a lock of Follet's mane, and Madame mourning for the pearls, which her husband deemed too sacred an heirloom to carry away to a foreign land. Poor little Eustacie, with her cousin Diane, was in the convent of Bellaise in Anjou. If any one lamented her absence, it was her father-in-law.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY COUNCIL.

"He counsels a divorce."
SHAKSPEARE, *King Henry VIII.*

IN the spring of the year 1572, a family council was assembled in Hurst Walwyn Hall. The scene was a wainscoted oriel chamber closed off by a screen from the great hall, and fitted on two sides by presses of books, surmounted the one by a terrestrial, the other by a celestial globe, the first "with the addition of the Indies" in very eccentric geography, the second with enormous stars studding highly grotesque figures, regarded with great awe by most beholders.

A solid oaken table stood in the midst, laden with books and papers, and in a corner, near the open hearth, a carved desk, bearing on one slope the largest copy of the "Bishops' Bible;" on the other, one of the Prayer-book. The ornaments of the oaken mantelpiece culminated in a shield bearing a cross *boutonnée*, i.e. with trefoil terminations. It was supported between a merman with a whelk shell and a mermaid with a comb, and another like Siren curled her tail on the top of the gaping baronial helmet above the shield, while two more upheld the main weight of the chimney-piece on either side of the glowing wood fire.

In the seat of honour was an old gentleman, white-haired, and feeble of limb, but with noble features and a keen, acute

eye. This was Sir William, Baron of Hurst Walwyn, a valiant knight at Guingate and Boulogne, a statesman of whom Wolsey had been jealous, and a ripe scholar who had shared the friendship of More and Erasmus. The lady who sat opposite to him was several years younger, still upright, brisk and active, though her hair was milk-white; but her eyes were of undimmed azure, and her complexion still retained a beauteous pink and white. She was highly educated, and had been the friend of Margaret Roper and her sisters, often sharing their walks in the bright Chelsea garden. Indeed, the musk-rose in her own favourite nook at Hurst Walwyn was cherished as the gift of Sir Thomas himself.

Near her sat her sister, Cecily St. John, a professed nun at Romsey till her twenty-eighth year, when, in the dispersion of convents, her sister's home had received her. There had she continued, never exposed to tests of opinion, but pursuing her quiet course according to her Benedictine rule, faithfully keeping her vows, and following the guidance of the chaplain, a college friend of Bishop Ridley, and rejoicing in the use of the vernacular prayers and Scriptures. When Queen Mary had sent for her to consider of the revival of convents, her views had been found to have so far diverged from those of the Queen that Lord Walwyn was thankful to have her safe at home again; and yet she fancied herself firm to old Romsey doctrine. She was not learned, like Lady Walwyn, but her knowledge in all needlework and confectionery was consummate, so that half the ladies in Dorset and Wilts longed to send their daughters to be educated at Hurst Walwyn. Her small figure and soft cheeks had the gentle contour of a dove's form, nor had she lost the conventual serenity of expression; indeed it was curious that, let Lady Walwyn array her as she would, whatever she wore bore a

nunlike air. Her silken farthingales hung like serge robes, her ruffs looked like mufflers, her coifs like hoods, even necklaces seemed rosaries, and her scrupulous neatness enhanced the pure unearthly air of all belonging to her.

Eager and lively, fair and handsome, sat the Baronne de Ribaumont, or rather, since the higher title had been laid aside, Dame Annora Thistlewood. The health of M. de Ribaumont had been shattered at St. Quentin, and an inclement night of crossing the Channel had brought on an attack on the lungs, from which he only rallied enough to amaze his English friends at finding the gay dissipated young Frenchman they remembered, infinitely more strict and rigid than themselves. He was never able to leave the house again after his first arrival at Hurst Walwyn, and sank under the cold winds of the next spring, rejoicing to leave his wife and son, not indeed among such strict Puritans as he preferred, but at least where the pure faith could be openly avowed without danger.

Sir Marmaduke Thistlewood, the husband to whom Annora Walwyn had been destined before M. de Ribaumont had crossed her path, was about the same time left a widower with one son and daughter, and as soon as a suitable interval had passed, she became a far happier wife than she had been in either the Baron's gay or grave days. Her son had continued under the roof of his grandfather, to whose charge his father had specially committed him, and thus had been scarcely separated from his mother, since Combe Manor was not above three miles across the downs from Hurst Walwyn, and there was almost daily intercourse between the families. Lucy Thistlewood had been brought to Hurst Walwyn to be something between a maid of honour and a pupil to the ladies there, and her brother Philip, so soon as he was old enough, daily rode thither to share with Berenger the

instructions of the chaplain, Mr. Adderley, who on the present occasion formed one of the conclave, sitting a little apart as not quite familiar, though highly esteemed.

With an elbow on the table, and one hand toying with his long riding-whip, sat, booted and spurred, the jovial figure of Sir Marmaduke, who called out, in his hearty voice, "A good riddance of an outlandish Papist, say I! Read the letter, Berenger lad. No, no, no! English it! I know nothing of your mincing French! 'Tis the worst fault I know in you, boy, to be half a Frenchman, and have a French name"—a fault that good Sir Marmaduke did his best to remedy by always terming his step-son Berenger or Berry Ribmount, and we will so far follow his example as henceforth to give the youth the English form of his Christian name. He was by this time a tall lad of eighteen, with straight features, honest deep blue eyes, very fair hair cut short and brushed up to a crest upon the middle of his head, a complexion of red and white that all the air of the downs and the sea failed to embrown, and that peculiar openness and candour of expression which seems so much an English birthright, that the only trace of his French origin was, that he betrayed no unbecoming awkwardness in the somewhat embarrassing position in which he was placed, literally standing, according to the respectful discipline of the time, as the subject of discussion, before the circle of his elders. His colour was, indeed, deepened, but his attitude was easy and graceful, and he used no stiff rigidity nor restless movements to mask his anxiety. At Sir Marmaduke's desire, he could not but redden a good deal more, but with a clear, unhesitating voice, he translated the letter that he had received from the Chevalier de Ribaumont, who, by the Count's death, had become Eustacie's guardian. It was a request in the name of Eustacie and her deceased father

that Monsieur le Baron de Ribaumont—who, it was understood, had embraced the English heresy—would concur with his spouse in demanding from his Holiness the Pope a decree annulling the childish marriage, which could easily be declared void, both on account of the consanguinity of the parties and the discrepancy of their faith; and which would leave each of them free to marry again.

"Nothing can be better," exclaimed his mother. "How I have longed to free him from that little shrew, whose tricks were the plague of my life! Now there is nothing between him and a worthy match!"

"We can make an Englishman of him now to the backbone," added Sir Marmaduke, "and it is well that it should be the lady herself who wants first to be off with it, so that none can say he has played her a scurvy trick."

"What say you, Berenger?" said Lord Walwyn. "Listen to me, fair nephew. You know that all my remnant of hope is fixed upon you, and that I have looked to setting you in the room of a son of my own; and I think that under our good Queen you will find it easier to lead a quiet God-fearing life than in your father's vexed country, where the Reformed religion lies under persecution. Natheless, being a born liegeman of the King of France, and heir to estates in his kingdom, meseemeth that before you are come to years of discretion it were well that you should visit them, and become better able to judge for youself how to deal in this matter when you shall have attained full age, and may be able to dispose of them by sale, thus freeing yourself from allegiance to a foreign prince. And at the same time you can take measures, in concert with this young lady, for loosing the wedlock so unhappily contracted."

"O sir, sir!" cried Lady Thistlewood, "send him not to France to be burnt by the Papists!"

"Peace, daughter," returned her mother. "Know you not that there is friendship between the court party and the Huguenots, and that the peace is to be sealed by the marriage of the King's sister with the King of Navarre? This is the most suitable time at which he could go."

"Then, madam," proceeded the lady, "he will be running about to all the preachings on every bleak moor and wet morass he can find, catching his death with rheums, like his poor father."

There was a general smile, and Sir Marmaduke laughed outright.

"Nay, dame," he said, "have you marked such a greed of sermons in our Berry that you should fear his so untowardly running after them?"

"Tilly-vally, Sir Duke," quoth Dame Annora, with a flirt of her fan, learnt at the French court. "Men will run after a preacher in a marshy bog out of pure frowardness, when they will nod at a godly homily on a well-stuffed bench between four walls."

"I shall commit that matter to Mr. Adderley, who is good enough to accompany him," said Lord Walwyn, "and by whose counsel I trust that he will steer the middle course between the Pope and Calvin."

Mr. Adderley bowed in answer, saying he hoped that he should be enabled to keep his pupil's mind clear between the allurements of Popery and the errors of the Reformed; but meanwhile Lady Thistlewood's mind had taken a leap, and she exclaimed,—

"And, son, whatever you do, bring home the chaplet of pearls! I know they have set their minds upon it. They wanted me to deck Eustacie with it on that unlucky bridal-day, but I would not hear of trusting her with it, and now will it rarely become our Lucy on your real wedding-day."

"You travel swiftly, daughter," said Lord Walwyn. "Nor have we yet heard the thoughts of one who ever thinks wisely. Sister," he added, turning to Cecily St. John, "hold not you with us in this matter?"

"I scarce comprehend it, my Lord," was the gentle reply. "I knew not that it was possible to dissolve the tie of wedlock."

"The Pope's decree will suffice," said Lord Walwyn.

"Yet, sir," still said the ex-nun, "methought you had shown me that the Holy Father exceeded his power in the annulling of vows."

"Using mine own lessons against me, sweet sister?" said Lord Walwyn, smiling; "yet, remember, the contract was rashly made between two ignorant babes; and, bred up as they have severally been, it were surely best for them to be set free from vows made without their true will or knowledge."

"And yet," said Cecily, perplexed, "when I saw my niece here wedded to Sir Marmaduke, was it not with the words, 'What God hath joined let no man put asunder?'"

"Good lack! aunt," cried Lady Thistlewood, "you would not have that poor lad wedded to a pert, saucy, ill-tempered little moppet, bred up at that den of iniquity, Queen Catherine's court, where my poor Baron never trusted me after he fell in with the religion, and had heard of King Antony's calling me the Swan of England."

At that moment there was a loud shriek, half-laugh, half-fright, coming through the window, and Lady Thistlewood, starting up, exclaimed, "The child will be drowned! Box their ears, Berenger, and bring them in directly."

Berenger, at her bidding, hurried out of the room into the hall, and thence down a flight of steps leading into a square walled garden, with a couple of stone male and female marine

divinities accommodating their fishy extremities as best they might on the corners of the wall. The square contained a bowling-green of exquisitely-kept turf, that looked as if cut out of green velvet, and was edged on its four sides by a raised broad-paved walk, with a trimming of flower-beds, where the earliest blossoms were showing themselves. In the centre of each side another paved path intersected the green lawn, and the meeting of these two diameters was at a circular stone basin, presided over by another merman, blowing a conch on the top of a pile of rocks. On the gravelled margin stood two distressed little damsels of seven and six years old, remonstrating with all their might against the proceedings of a roguish-looking boy of fourteen or fifteen, who had perched their junior—a fat, fair, kitten-like element of mischief, aged about five—*en croupe* on the merman, and was about, according to her delighted request, to make her a bower of water, by extracting the plug and setting the fountain to play; but as the fountain had been still all the winter, the plug was hard of extraction, especially to a young gentleman who stood insecurely, with his feet wide apart upon pointed and slippery points of rock-work; and Berenger had time to hurry up, exclaiming, "Giddy pate! Dolly would be drenched to the skin."

"And she has on her best blue, made out of mother's French farthingale," cried the discreet Annora.

"Do you know, Dolly, I've orders to box your ears, and send you in?" added Berenger, as he lifted his little half-sister from her perilous position, speaking, as he did so, without a shade of foreign accent, though with much more rapid utterance than was usual in England. She clung to him without much alarm, and retaliated by an endeavour to box his ears, while Philip, slowly making his way back to the mainland, exclaimed, "Ah, there's no chance now! Here

comes demure Mistress Lucy, and she is the worst mar-sport of all."

A gentle girl of seventeen was drawing near, her fair delicately-tinted complexion suiting well with her pale golden hair. It was a sweet face, and was well set off by the sky-blue of the farthingale, which, with her white lace coif and white ruff, gave her something the air of a speedwell flower, more especially as her expression seemed to have caught much of Cecily's air of self-restrained contentment. She held a basketful of the orange pistils of crocuses, and at once seeing that some riot had taken place, she said to the eldest little girl, "Ah, Nan, you had been safer gathering saffron with me."

"Nay, brother Berry came and made all well," said Annora; "and he had been shut up so long in the library that he must have been very glad to get out."

"And what came of it?" cried Philip. "Are you to go and get yourself unmarried?"

"Unmarried!" burst out the sisters Annora and Elizabeth.

"What," laughed Philip, "you knew not that this is an ancient husband, married years before your father and mother?"

"But, why?" said Elizabeth, rather inclined to cry. "What has poor Lucy done that you should get yourself unmarried from her?"

There was a laugh from both brothers; but Berenger, seeing Lucy's blushes, restrained himself, and said, "Mine was not such good luck, Bess, but they gave me a little French wife, younger than Dolly, and saucier still; and as she seems to wish to be quit of me, why, I shall be rid of her."

"See there, Dolly," said Philip, in a warning voice, "that is the way you'll be served if you do not mend your ways."

"But I thought," said Annora gravely, "that people were married once for all, and it could not be undone."

"So said Aunt Cecily, but my Lord was proving to her out of all law that a contract between such a couple of babes went for nought," said Berenger.

"And shall you, indeed, see Paris, and all the braveries there?" asked Philip. "I thought my Lord would never have trusted you out of his sight."

"And now it is to be only with Mr. Adderley," said Berenger; "but there will be rare doings to be seen at this royal wedding, and maybe I shall break a lance there in your honour, Lucy."

"And you'll bring me a French fan?" cried Bess.

"And me a pouncet-box?" added Annora.

"And me a French puppet, dressed Paris fashion?" said Dolly.

"And what shall he bring Lucy?" added Bess.

"I know," said Annora; "the pearls that mother is always talking about! I heard her say that Lucy should wear them on her wedding-day."

"Hush!" interposed Lucy, "don't you see my father yonder on the step, beckoning to you?"

The children flew towards Sir Marmaduke, leaving Berenger and Lucy together.

"Not a word to wish me good speed, Lucy, now I have my wish?" said Berenger.

"Oh yes," said Lucy, "I am glad you should see all those brave French gentlemen of whom you used to tell me."

"Yes, they will be all at court, and the good Admiral is said to be in high favour. He will surely remember my father."

"And shall you see the lady?" asked Lucy, under her breath.

"Eustacie? Probably; but that will make no change. I have heard too much of *l'escadron de la Reine-mère* to endure the thought of a wife from thence, were she the Queen of Beauty herself. And my mother says that Eustacie would lose all her beauty as she grew up—like black-eyed Sue on the down; nor did I ever think her brown skin and fierce black eyes to compare with you, Lucy. I could be well content never to see her more; but," and here he lowered his voice to a tone of confidence, "my father, when near his death, called me, and told me that he feared my marriage would be a cause of trouble and temptation to me, and that I must deal with it after my conscience when I was able to judge in the matter. Something, too, he said of the treaty of marriage being a burthen on his soul, but I know not what he meant. If ever I saw Eustacie again, I was to give her his own copy of Clement Marot's Psalter, and to tell her that he had ever loved and prayed for her as a daughter; and, moreover, my father added," said Berenger, much moved at the remembrance it brought across him, "that if this matter proved a burthen and perplexity to me, I was to pardon him as one who repented of it as a thing done ere he had learnt to weigh the whole world against a soul."

"Yes, you must see her," said Lucy.

"Well, what more were you going to say, Lucy?

"I was only thinking," said Lucy, as she raised her eyes to him, "how sorry she will be that she let them write that letter."

Berenger laughed, pleased with the simplicity of Lucy's admiration, but with modesty and commonsense enough to answer, "No fear of that, Lucy, for an heiress, with all the court gallants of France at her feet."

"Ah, but you!"

"I am all very well here, where you have never seen any-

body but lubberly Dorset squires that never went to London, nor Oxford, nor beyond their own furrows," said Berenger; "but depend upon it, she has been bred up to care for all the airs and graces that are all the fashion at Paris now, and will be as glad to be rid of an honest man and a Protestant as I shall to be quit of a court puppet and a Papist. Shall you have finished my point-cuffs next week, Lucy? Depend upon it, no gentleman of them all will wear such dainty lace of such a fancy as those will be."

And Lucy smiled, well pleased.

Coming from the companionship of Eustacie to that of gentle Lucy had been to Berenger a change from perpetual warfare to perfect supremacy, and his preference to his little sister, as he had been taught to call her from the first, had been loudly expressed. Brother and sister they had ever since considered themselves, and only within the last few months had possibilities been discussed among the elders of the family, which oozing out in some mysterious manner, had become felt rather than known among the young people, yet without altering the habitual terms that existed between them. Both were so young that love was the merest, vaguest dream to them; and Lucy, in her quiet faith that Berenger was the most beautiful, excellent, and accomplished cavalier the earth could afford, was little troubled about her own future share in him. She seemed to be promoted to belong to him just as she had grown up to curl her hair and wear ruffs and farthingales. And to Berenger Lucy was a very pleasant feature in that English home, where he had been far happier than in the uncertainties of Château Leurre, between his naughty playfellow, his capricious mother, and morose father. If in England his lot was to be cast, Lucy was acquiesced in willingly as a portion of that lot.

CHAPTER IV.

TITHONUS.

" A youth came riding towards a palace gate,
And from the palace came a child of sin
And took him by the curls and led him in !
Where sat a company with heated eyes."

TENNYSON, *A Vision of Sin.*

It was in the month of June that Berenger de Ribaumont first came in sight of Paris. His grandfather had himself begun by taking him to London and presenting him to Queen Elizabeth, from whom the lad's good mien procured him a most favourable reception. She willingly promised that on which Lord Walwyn's heart was set, namely, that his title and rank should be continued to his grandson ; and an ample store of letters of recommendation to Sir Francis Walsingham, the Ambassador, and all others who could be of service in the French court, were to do their utmost to provide him with a favourable reception there.

Then, with Mr. Adderley and four or five servants, he had crossed the Channel, and had gone first to Château Leurre, where he was rapturously welcomed by the old steward Osbert. The old man had trained up his son Landry, Berenger's foster-brother, to become his valet, and had him taught all the arts of hairdressing and surgery that were part of the profession of a gentleman's body-servant ; and the youth, a smart, acute

young Norman, became a valuable addition to the suite, the guidance of which, through a foreign country, their young master did not find very easy. Mr. Adderley thought he knew French very well, through books, but the language he spoke was not available, and he soon fell into a state of bewilderment rather hard on his pupil, who, though a very good boy, and crammed very full of learning, was still nothing more than a lad of eighteen in all matters of prudence and discretion.

Lord Walwyn was, as we have seen, one of those whose Church principles had altered very little and very gradually; and in the utter diversity of practice that prevailed in the early years of Queen Elizabeth, his chaplain as well as the rector of the parish had altered no more than was absolutely enjoined of the old ceremonial. If the poor Baron de Ribaumont had ever been well enough to go to church on a Sunday, he would perhaps have thought himself still in the realms of what he considered as darkness; but as he had never openly broken with the Gallic Church, Berenger had gone at once from mass at Leurre to the Combe Walwyn service. Therefore when he spent a Sunday at Rouen, and attended a Calvinist service in the building that the Huguenots were permitted outside the town, he was much disappointed in it; he thought its very fervour familiar and irreverent, and felt himself much more at home in the cathedral into which he strayed in the afternoon. And, on the Sunday he was at Leurre, he went, as a part of his old home-habits, to mass at the old round-arched church, where he and Eustacie had played each other so many teasing tricks at his mother's feet, and had received so many admonitory nips, and strokes of her fan. All he saw there was not congenial to him, but he liked it vastly better than the Huguenot meeting, and was not prepared to understand or enter into Mr. Adderley's

vexation; when the tutor assured him that the reverent gestures that came naturally to him were regarded by he Protestants as idolatry, and that he would be viewed as a recreant from his faith. All Mr. Adderley hoped was that no one would hear of it: and in this he felt himself disappointed, when, in the midst of his lecture, there walked into the room a little, withered, brown, dark-eyed man, in a gorgeous dress of green and gold, who doffing a hat with an umbrageous plume, precipitated himself, as far as he could reach, towards Berenger's neck, calling him fair cousin and dear baron. The lad stood, taken by surprise for a moment, thinking that Tithonus must have looked just like this, and skipped like this, just as he became a grasshopper; then he recollected that this must be the Chevalier de Ribaumont, and tried to make up for his want of cordiality. The old man had, it appeared, come out of Picardy, where he lived on *soupe maigre* in a corner of the ancestral castle, while his son and daughter were at court, the one in Monsieur's suite, the other in that of the Queen-mother. He had come purely to meet his dear young cousin, and render him all the assistance in his power, conduct him to Paris, and give him introductions.

Berenger, who had begun to find six Englishmen a troublesome charge in France, was rather relieved at not being the only French scholar of the party, and the Chevalier also hinted to him that he spoke with a dreadful Norman accent that would never be tolerated at court, even if it were understood by the way. Moreover, the Chevalier studied him all over, and talked of Paris tailors and posture-masters, and, though the pink of politeness, made it evident that there was immensely too much of him. "It might be the custom in England to be so tall; here no one was of anything like such a height, but the Duke of Guise. He, in his position, with

his air, could carry it off, but we must adapt ourselves as best we can."

And his shrug and look of concern made Berenger for a moment almost ashamed of that superfluous height of which they were all so proud at home. Then he recollected himself, and asked, "And why should not I be tall as well as M. de Guise?"

"We shall see, fair cousin," he answered, with an odd satirical bow; "we are as Heaven made us. All lies in the management, and if you had the advantages of training, *perhaps* you could even turn your height into a grace."

"Am I such a great lubber?" wondered Berenger; "they did not think so at home. No; nor did the Queen. She said I was a proper stripling! Well, it matters the less, as I shall not stay long to need their favour; and I'll show them there is some use in my inches in the tilt-yard. But if they think me such a lout, what would they say to honest Philip?"

The Chevalier seemed willing to take on him the whole management of his "fair cousin." He inquired into the amount of the rents and dues which old Osbert had collected and held ready to meet the young Baron's exigencies; and which would, it seemed, be all needed to make his dress any way presentable at court. The pearls, too, were inquired for, and handed over by Osbert to his young Lord's keeping, with the significant intimation that they had been demanded when the young Madame la Baronne went to court; but that he had buried them in the orchard, and made answer that they were not in the château. The contract of marriage, which Berenger could just remember signing, and seeing signed by his father, the King, and the Count, was not forthcoming; and the Chevalier explained that it was in the hands of a notary at Paris. For this Berenger was not sorry.

His grandfather had desired him to master the contents, and he thought he had thus escaped a very dry and useless study.

He did not exactly dislike the old Chevalier de Ribaumont. The system on which he had been brought up had not been indulgent, so that compliments and admiration were an agreeable surprise to him; and rebuffs and rebukes from his elders had been so common, that hints, in the delicate dressing of the old knight, came on him almost like gracious civilities. There was no love lost between the Chevalier and the chaplain, that was plain; but how could there be between an ancient French courtier and a sober English divine? However, to Mr. Adderley's great relief, no attempts were made on Berenger's faith, his kinsman even was disposed to promote his attendance at such Calvinist places of worship as they passed on the road, and treated him in all things as a mere guest, to be patronised indeed, but as much an alien as if he had been born in England. And yet there was a certain deference to him as head of the family, and a friendliness of manner that made the boy feel him a real relation, and all through the journey it came naturally that he should be the entire manager, and Berenger the paymaster on a liberal scale.

Thus had the travellers reached the neighbourhood of Paris, when a jingling of chains and a trampling of horses announced the advance of riders, and several gentlemen with a troop of servants came in sight.

All were gaily dressed, with feathered hats, and short Spanish cloaks jauntily disposed over one shoulder; and their horses were trapped with bright silvered ornaments. As they advanced, the Chevalier exclaimed: "Ah! it is my son! I knew he would come to meet me." And, simultaneously, father and son leapt from their horses, and rushed

into each other's arms. Berenger felt it only courteous to dismount and exchange embraces with his cousin, but with a certain sense of repulsion at the cloud of perfume that seemed to surround the younger Chevalier de Ribaumont; the earrings in his ears; the general air of delicate research about his riding-dress, and the elaborate attention paid to a small, dark, sallow face and figure, in which the only tolerable feature was an intensely black and piercing pair of eyes.

"Cousin, I am enchanted to welcome you."

"Cousin, I thank you."

"Allow me to present you." And Berenger bowed low in succession several times in reply to salutations, as his cousin Narcisse named M. d'O, M. de la Valette, M. de Pibrac, M. l'Abbé de Méricour, who had done him the honour to accompany him in coming out to meet his father and M. le Baron. Then the two cousins remounted, something was said to the Chevalier of the devoirs of the demoiselles, and they rode on together bandying news and repartee so fast, that Berenger felt that his ears had become too much accustomed to the more deliberate English speech to enter at once into what caused so much excitement, gesture, and wit. The royal marriage seemed doubtful—the Pope refused his sanction; nay, but means would be found—the King would not be impeded by the Pope; Spanish influence—nay, the King had thrown himself at the head of the Reformed—he was bewitched with the grim old Coligny—if order were not soon taken, the Louvre itself would become a temple.

Then one of the party turned suddenly and said, "But I forget, Monsieur is a Huguenot?"

"I am a Protestant of the English Church," said Berenger, rather stiffly, in the formula of his day.

"Well, you have come at the right moment. 'Tis all for the sermon now. If the little Abbé there wishes to sail with

a fair wind, he should throw away his breviary and study his Calvin."

Berenger's attention was thus attracted to the Abbé de Méricour, a young man of about twenty, whose dress was darker than that of the rest, and his hat of a clerical cut, though in other respects he was equipped with the same point-device elegance.

"Calvin would never give him the rich abbey of Selicy," said another; "the breviary is the safer speculation."

"Ah! M. de Ribaumont can tell you that abbeys are no such securities in these days. Let yonder Admiral get the upper hand, and we shall see Méricour, the happy cadet of eight brothers and sisters, turned adrift from their convents. What a fatherly spectacle M. le Marquis will present!"

Here the Chevalier beckoned to Berenger, who, riding forward, learnt that Narcisse had engaged lodgings for him and his suite at one of the great inns, and Berenger returned his thanks, and a proposal to the Chevalier to become his guest. They were by this time entering the city, where the extreme narrowness and dirt of the streets contrasted with the grandeur of the palatial courts that could be partly seen through their archways. At the hostel they rode under such an arch, and found themselves in a paved yard that would have been grand had it been clean. Privacy had scarcely been invented, and the party were not at all surprised to find that the apartment prepared for them was to serve both day and night for Berenger, the Chevalier, and Mr. Adderley, besides having a truckle-bed on the floor for Osbert. Meals were taken in public, and it was now one o'clock—just dinner time; so after a hasty toilette the three gentlemen descended, the rest of the party having ridden off to their quarters, either as attendants of Monsieur or to their families. It was a sumptuous meal, at which a great number of gentlemen were

present, coming in from rooms hired over shops, &c.—all, as it seemed, assembled at Paris for the marriage festivities ; but Berenger began to gather that they were for the most part adherents of the Guise party, and far from friendly to the Huguenot interest. Some of them appeared hardly to tolerate Mr. Adderley's presence at the table ; and Berenger, though his kinsman's patronage secured civil treatment, felt much out of his element, confused, unable to take part in the conversation, and sure that he was where those at home did not wish to see him.

No sooner was the dinner over than he rose and expressed his intention of delivering his letters of introduction in person to the English ambassador and to the Admiral de Coligny, whom, as his father's old friend and the hero of his boyhood, he was most anxious to see. The Chevalier demurred to this. Were it not better to take measures at once for making himself presentable, and Narcisse had already supplied him with directions to the fashionable haircutter, &c. It would be taken amiss if he went to the Admiral before going to present himself to the King.

"And I cannot see my cousins till I go to court?" asked Berenger.

"Most emphatically No. Have I not told you that the one is in the suite of the young Queen, the other in that of the Queen-mother? I will myself present you, if only you will give me the honour of your guidance."

"With all thanks, Monsieur," said Berenger ; "my grandfather's desire was that I should lose no time in going to his old friend Sir Francis Walsingham, and I had best submit myself to his judgment as to my appearance at court."

On this point Berenger was resolute, though the Chevalier recurred to the danger of any proceeding that might be unacceptable at court. Berenger, harassed and impatient, repeated

that he did not care about the court, and wished merely to fulfil his purpose and return, at which his kinsman shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, and muttered to himself, "Ah, what does he know! He will regret it when too late; but I have done my best."

Berenger paid little attention to this, but calling Landry Osbert, and a couple of his men, he bade them take their swords and bucklers, and escort him in his walk through Paris. He set off with a sense of escape, but before he had made many steps, he was obliged to turn and warn Humfrey and Jack that they were not to walk swaggering along the streets, with hand on sword, as if every Frenchman they saw was the natural foe of their master.

Very tall were the houses, very close and extremely filthy the streets, very miserable the beggars; and yet here and there was to be seen the open front of a most brilliant shop, and the thoroughfares were crowded with richly-dressed gallants. Even the wider streets gave little space for the career of the gay horsemen who rode along them, still less for the great, cumbrous, though gaily-decked coaches, in which ladies appeared glittering with jewels and fan in hand, with tiny white dogs on their knees.

The persons of whom Berenger inquired the way all uncapped most respectfully, and replied with much courtesy; but when the hotel of the English ambassador had been pointed out to him, he hardly believed it, so foul and squalid was the street, where a large nail-studded door occupied a wide archway. Here was a heavy iron knocker, to which Osbert applied himself. A little door was at once opened by a large, powerful John Bull of a porter, whose looks expanded into friendly welcome when he heard the English tongue of the visitor. Inside, the scene was very unlike that without. The hotel was built round a paved court,

adorned with statues and stone vases, with yews and cypresses in them, and a grand flight of steps led up to the grand centre of the house, around which were collected a number of attendants, wearing the Walsingham colours. Among these Berenger left his two Englishmen, well content to have fallen into an English colony. Landry followed him to an anteroom, while the groom of the chambers went forward to announce the visitor, Berenger waiting to know whether the Ambassador would be at liberty to see him.

Almost immediately the door was re-opened, and a grey-headed, keen-looking gentleman, rather short in stature, but nevertheless very dignified-looking, came forward with outstretched hands—"Greet you well, my Lord de Ribaumont. We expected your coming. Welcome, mine old friend's grandson."

And as Berenger bent low in reverent greeting, Sir Francis took his hand and kissed his brow, saying, "Come in, my young friend; we are but sitting over our wine and comfits after dinner. Have you dined?"

Berenger explained that he had dined at the inn, where he had taken lodgings.

"Nay, but that must not be. My Lord Walwyn's grandson here, and not my guest! You do me wrong, sir, in not having ridden hither at once."

"Truly, my Lord, I ventured not. They sent me forth with quite a company—my tutor and six grooms."

"Our chaplain will gladly welcome his reverend brother," said Sir Francis; "and as to the grooms, one of my fellows shall go and bring them and their horses up. What!" rather gravely, as Berenger still hesitated. "I have letters for you here, which methinks will make your grandfather's wish clear to you."

Berenger saw the Ambassador was displeased with his

reluctance, and answered quickly, "In sooth, my Lord, I would esteem myself only too happy to be thus honoured, but in sooth——" he repeated himself, and faltered.

"In sooth, you expected more freedom than in my grave house," said Walsingham, displeased.

"Not so, my Lord: it would be all that I could desire; but I have done hastily. A kinsman of mine has come up to Paris with me, and I have made him my guest. I know not how to break with him—the Chevalier de Ribaumont."

"What, the young ruffler in Monsieur's suite?"

"No, my Lord; his father. He comes on my business. He is an old man, and can ill bear the cost, and I could scarce throw him over."

Berenger spoke with such earnest, bright, open simplicity, and look so boyish and confiding, that Sir Francis's heart was won, and he smiled as he said, "Right, lad, you are a considerate youth. It were not well to cast off your kinsman; but when you have read your letters, you may well plead your grandfather's desires, to say nothing of a hint from her Grace to have an eye to you. And for the rest, you can acquit yourself gracefully to the gentleman, by asking him to occupy the lodging that you had taken."

Berenger's face brightened up in a manner that spoke for his sincerity; and Sir Francis added, "And where be these lodgings?"

"At the Croix de Lorraine."

"Ha! your kinsman has taken you into a nest of Guisards. But come, let me present you to my wife and my other guests, then will I give you your letters, and you shall return and make your excuses to Monsieur le Chevalier."

Berenger seemed to himself to be on familiar ground again as his host thus assumed the direction of him and ushered him into a large dining-hall, where the table had been

forsaken in favour of a lesser table placed in the ample window, round which sat assembled some six or eight persons, with fruit, wine, and conserves before them, a few little dogs at their feet or on their laps, and a lute lying on the knee of one of the young gentlemen. Sir Francis presented the young Lord de Ribaumont, their expected guest, to Lady Walsingham, from whom he received a cordial welcome, and her two young daughters, Frances and Elizabeth, and likewise to the gentleman with the lute, a youth about a year older than Berenger, and of very striking and prepossessing countenance, who was named as Mr. Sidney, the son of the Lord Deputy of Ireland. A couple of gentlemen who would in these times have been termed *attachés*, a couple of lady attendants upon Lady Walsingham, and the chaplain made up the party, which on this day chanced only to include, besides the household, the young traveller, Sidney. Berenger was at once seated, and accepted a welcoming-cup of wine (*i.e.* a long slender glass with a beautifully twisted stem), responded to friendly inquiries about his relatives at home, and acknowledged the healths that were drunk in honour of their names; after which Lady Walsingham begged that Mr. Sidney would sing the madrigal he had before promised: afterwards a glee was sung by Sidney, one of the gentlemen, and the two sisters; and it was discovered that M. de Ribaumont had a trained ear, and the very voice that was wanting to the Italian song they were practising. And so sped a happy hour, till a booted and spurred messenger came in with letters for his Excellency, who being thus roused from his dreamy enjoyment of the music, carried young Ribaumont off with him to his cabinet, and there made over to him a packet, with good news from home, and orders that made it clear that he could do no other than accept the hospitality of the Embassy.

Thus armed with authority, he returned to the Croix de Lorraine, where Mr. Adderley could not contain his joy at the change to quarters not only so much more congenial, but so much safer; and the Chevalier, after some polite demur, consented to remain in possession of the rooms, being in fact well satisfied with the arrangement.

"Let him steep himself up to the lips among the English," said Tithonus to his son. "Thus will he peaceably relinquish to you all that should have been yours from the first, and at court will only be looked on as an overgrown English page."

The change to the Ambassador's made Berenger happy at once. He was not French enough in breeding, or even constitution, to feel the society of the Croix de Lorraine congenial; and, kind as the Chevalier showed himself, it was with a wonderful sense of relief that Berenger shook himself free from both his fawning and his patronising. There was a constant sense of not understanding the old gentleman's aims, whereas in Walsingham's house all was as clear, easy, and open as at home.

And though Berenger had been educated in the country, it had been in the same tone as that of his new friends. He was greatly approved by Sir Francis as a stripling of parts and modesty. Mr. Sidney made him a companion, and the two young ladies treated him as neither lout nor lubber. Yet he could not be at ease in his state between curiosity and repulsion towards the wife who was to be discarded by mutual consent. The sight of the scenes of his early childhood had stirred up warmer recollections of the pretty little playful torment whom through the vista of years assumed the air of a tricksy elf rather than the little vixen he used to think her. His curiosity had been further stimulated by the sight of his rival, Narcisse, whose effeminate ornaments,

small stature, and seat on horseback filled Sir Marmaduke's pupil with inquisitive disdain as to the woman who could prefer anything so unmanly.

Sidney was to be presented at the after-dinner reception at the Louvre the next day, and Sir Francis proposed to take young Ribaumont with him. Berenger coloured, and spoke of his equipment, and Sidney good-naturedly offered to come and inspect. That young gentleman was one of the daintiest in apparel of his day; but he was amazed that the suit in which Berenger had paid his devoir to Queen Elizabeth should have been set aside—it was of pearl-grey velvet, slashed with rose-coloured satin, and in shape and fashion point-device—unless, as the Ambassador said good-humouredly, "my young Lord Ribaumont wished to be one of Monsieur's clique." Thus arrayed, then, and with the chaplet of pearls bound round the small cap, with a heron-plume that sat jauntily on one side of his fair curled head, Berenger took his seat beside the hazel-eyed, brown-haired Sidney, in his white satin and crimson, and with the Ambassador and his attendants were rolled off in the great state-coach drawn by eight horses, which had no sinecure in dragging the ponderous machine through the unsavoury *débris* of the streets.

Royalty fed in public. The sumptuous banqueting-room contained a barrier, partitioning off a space where Charles IX. sat alone at his table, as a State spectacle. He was a sallow, unhealthy-looking youth, with large prominent dark eyes and a melancholy dreaminess of expression, as if the whole ceremony, not to say the world itself, were distasteful. Now and then, as though endeavouring to cast off the mood, he would call to some gentleman and exchange a rough jest, generally fortified with a tremendous oath, that startled Berenger's innocent ears. He scarcely tasted what was put

on his plate, but drank largely of sherbet, and seemed to be trying to linger through the space allotted for the ceremony.

Silence was observed, but not so absolute that Walsingham could not point out to his young companions the notabilities present. The lofty figure of Henri, Duke of Guise, towered high above all around him, and his grand features, proud lip, and stern eye claimed such natural superiority that Berenger for a moment felt a glow on his cheek as he remembered his challenge of his right to rival that splendid stature. And yet Guise was very little older than himself; but he walked, a prince of men, among a crowd of gentlemen, attendants on him rather than on the King. The elegant but indolent-looking Duke de Montmorency had a much more attractive air, and seemed to hold a kind of neutral ground between Guise on the one hand, and the Reformed, who mustered at the other end of the apartment. Almost by intuition, Berenger knew the fine calm features of the grey-haired Admiral de Coligny before he heard him so addressed by the King's loud, rough voice. When the King rose from table the presentations took place, but as Charles heard the name of the Baron de Ribaumont, he exclaimed, "What, Monsieur, are you presented here by our good sister's representative?"

Walsingham answered for him, alluding to the negotiations for Queen Elizabeth's marriage with one of the French princes—"Sire, in the present happy conjuncture, it needs not be a less loyal Frenchman to have an inheritance in the lands of my royal mistress."

"What say you, Monsieur?" sharply demanded the King; "are you come here to renounce your country, religion—and love, as I have been told?"

"I hope, Sire, never to be unfaithful where I owe faith," said Berenger, heated, startled, and driven to extremity.

"Not ill-answered for the English giant," said Charles

aside to an attendant: then turning eagerly to Sidney, whose transcendant accomplishments had already become renowned, Charles welcomed him to court, and began to discuss Ronsard's last sonnet, showing no small taste and knowledge of poetry. Greatly attracted by Sidney, the King detained the whole English party by an invitation to Walsingham to hear music in the Queen-mother's apartments; and Berenger, following in the wake of his friends, found himself in a spacious hall, with a raised gallery at one end for the musicians, the walls decorated with the glorious paintings collected by François I., Greek and Roman statues clustered at the angles, and cabinets with gems and antiques disposed at intervals. Not that Berenger beheld much of this: he was absolutely dazzled with the brilliant assembly into which he was admitted. There moved the most beautiful women in France, in every lovely-coloured tint that dress could assume: their bosoms, arms, and hair sparkling with jewels; their gossamer ruffs surrounding their necks like fairy wings; their light laugh mingling with the music, as they sat, stood, or walked in graceful attitudes conversing with one another or with the cavaliers, whose brilliant velvet and jewels fitly mixed with their bright array. These were the sirens he had heard of, the "squadron of the Queen-mother," the dangerous beings against whom he was to steel himself. And which of them was the child he had played with, to whom his vows had been plighted? It was like some of the enchanting dreams of romance merely to look at these fair creatures; and he stood as if gazing into a magic-glass till Sir Francis Walsingham, looking round for him, said, "Come, then, my young friend, you must do your devoirs to the Queens. Sidney, I see, is as usual in his element; the King has seized upon him.

Catherine de Medicis was seated on a large velvet chair, conversing with the German ambassador. Never beautiful, she appeared to more advantage in her mature years than in her girlhood, and there was all the dignity of a lifetime of rule in her demeanour and gestures, the bearing of her head, and motion of her exquisite hands. Her eyes were like her son's, prominent, and gave the sense of seeing all round at once, and her smile was to the highest degree engaging. She received the young Baron de Ribaumont far more graciously than Charles had done, held out her hand to be kissed, and observed "that the young gentleman was like Madame *sa mère* whom she well remembered as much admired. Was it true that she was married in England?"

Berenger bowed assent.

"Ah! you English make good spouses," she said, with a smile. "Ever satisfied with home! But, your Excellency," added she, turning to Walsingham, "what stones would best please my good sister for the setting of the jewel my son would send her with his portrait? He is all for emeralds for the hue of hope; but I call it the colour of jealousy."

Walsingham made a sign that Berenger had better retreat from hearing the solemn coquetting carried on by the maiden Queen through her gravest ambassadors. He fell back, and remained watching the brilliant throng, trying in vain to discover the bright merry eyes and velvet cheek he remembered of old. Presently a kindly salutation interrupted him, and a gentleman who perceived him to be a stranger began to try to set him at ease, pointed out to him the handsome, foppishly-dressed Duke of Anjou, and his ugly, spiteful little brother of Alençon, then designated as Queen Elizabeth's future husband, who was saying something to a lady that made her colour and bite her lips. "Is that the younger Queen?" asked Berenger, as his eye fell on

a sallow, dark-complexioned, sad-looking little creature in deep mourning, and with three or four such stately-looking, black-robed, Spanish-looking duennas round her as to prove her to be a person of high consequence.

"That? Oh no; that is Madame Catherine of Navarre, who has resided here ever since her mother's death, awaiting her brother, our royal bridegroom. See, here is the bride, Madame Marguerite, conversing with M. de Guise."

Berenger paid but little heed to Marguerite's showy but already rather coarse beauty, and still asked where was the young Queen Elizabeth of Austria. She was unwell, and not in presence. "Ah! then," he said, "her ladies will not be here."

"That is not certain. Are you wishing to see any one of them?"

"I would like to see——" He could not help colouring till his cheeks rivalled the colour of his sword-knot. "I want just to know if she is here. I know not if she be called Madame or Mademoiselle de Ribaumont."

"The fair Ribaumont! Assuredly; see, she is looking at you. Shall I present you?"

A pair of exceedingly brilliant dark eyes were fixed on Berenger with a sort of haughty curiosity and half-recognition. The face was handsome and brilliant, but he felt indignant at not perceiving a particle of a blush at encountering him, indeed rather a look of amusement at the deep glow which his fair complexion rendered so apparent. He would fain have escaped from so public an interview, but her eye was upon him, and there was no avoiding the meeting. As he moved nearer he saw what a beautiful person she was, her rich primrose-coloured dress setting off her brunette complexion and her stately presence. She looked older than he had expected; but this was a hotbed

where every one grew up early, and the expression and manner made him feel that an old intimacy was here renewed, and that they were no strangers.

"We need no introduction, cousin," she said, giving a hand to be saluted. "I knew you instantly. It is the old face of Château Leurre, only gone up so high and become so handsome."

"Cousins," thought he. "Well, it makes things easier! but what audacity to be so much at her ease, when Lucy would have sunk into the earth with shame." His bow had saved him the necessity of answering in words, and the lady continued:

"And Madame *votre mère*. Is she well? She was very good to me."

Berenger did not think that kindness to Eustacie had been her chief perfection, but he answered that she was well and sent her commendations, which the young lady acknowledged by a magnificent curtsey. "And as beautiful as ever?" she asked.

"Quite as beautiful," he said, "only somewhat more *embonpoint*."

"Ah!" she said, smiling graciously, and raising her splendid eyes to his face, "I understand better what that famous beauty was now, and the fairness that caused her to be called the Swan."

It was so personal that the colour rushed again into his cheek. No one had ever so presumed to admire him; and with a degree gratified and surprised, and sensible more and more of the extreme beauty of the lady, there was a sort of alarm about him as if this were the very fascination he had been warned against, and as if she were casting a net about him, which, wife as she was, it would be impossible to him to break.

"Nay, Monsieur," she laughed, "is a word from one so near too much for your modesty? Is it possible that no one has yet told you of your good mien? Or do they not appreciate Greek noses and blue eyes in the land of fat Englishmen? How have you ever lived *en province?* Our princes are ready to hang themselves at the thought of being in such banishment, even at court—indeed, Monsieur has contrived to transfer the noose to M. d'Alençon. Have you been at court, cousin?"

"I have been presented to the Queen."

She then proceeded to ask questions about the chief personages with a rapid intelligence that surprised him as well as alarmed him, for he felt more and more in the power of a very clever as well as beautiful woman, and the attraction she exercised made him long the more to escape; but she smiled and signed away several cavaliers who would have gained her attention. She spoke of Queen Mary of Scotland, then in the fifth year of her captivity, and asked if he did not feel bound to her service by having been once her partner. Did not he remember that dance?

"I have heard my mother speak of it far too often to forget it," said Berenger, glowing again for her who could speak of that occasion without a blush.

"You wish to gloss over your first inconstancy, sir," she said, archly; but he was spared from further reply by Philip Sidney's coming to tell him that the Ambassador was ready to return home. He took leave with an alacrity that redoubled his courtesy so much that he desired to be commended to his cousin Diane, whom he had not seen.

"To Diane?" said the lady, inquiringly.

"To Mademoiselle Diane de Ribaumont," he corrected himself, ashamed of his English rusticity. "I beg pardon if I spoke too familiarly of her."

"She should be flattered by M. le Baron's slightest recollection," said the lady, with an ironical tone that there was no time to analyse, and with a mutual gesture of courtesy he followed Sidney to where Sir Francis awaited them.

"Well, what think you of the French court?" asked Sidney, so soon as the young men were in private.

"I only know that you may bless your good fortune that you stand in no danger from a wife from thence."

"Ha!" cried Sidney, laughing, "you found your lawful owner. Why did you not present me?"

"I was ashamed of her bold visage."

"What!—was she the beauteous demoiselle I found you gallanting," said Philip Sidney, a good deal entertained, "who was gazing at you with such visible admiration in her languishing black eyes?"

"The foul fiend seize their impudence!"

"Fie! for shame! thus to speak of your own wife," said the mischievous Sidney, "and the fairest——"

"Go to, Sidney. Were she fairer than Venus, with a kingdom to her dower, I would none of a woman without a blush."

"What in converse with her wedded husband," said Sidney. "Were not that over-shamefastness?"

"Nay, now, Sidney, in good sooth give me your opinion. Should she set her fancy on me, even in this hour, am I bound in honour to hold by this accursed wedlock—lock, as it may well be called?"

"I know no remedy," said Sidney, gravely, "save the two enchanted founts of love and hate. They cannot be far away, since it was at the siege of Paris that Rinaldo and Orlando drank thereof."

Another question that Berenger would fain have asked Sidney, but could not for very shame and dread of mockery,

was, whether he himself were so dangerously handsome as the lady had given him to understand. With a sense of shame, he caught up the little mirror in his casket, and could not but allow to himself that the features he there saw were symmetrical—the eyes azure, the complexion of a delicate fairness, such as he had not seen equalled, except in those splendid Lorraine princes; nor could he judge of the further effect of his open-faced frank simplicity and sweetness of expression—contemptible, perhaps, to the astute, but most winning to the world-weary. He shook his head at the fair reflection, smiled as he saw the colour rising at his own sensation of being a fool, and then threw it aside, vexed with himself for being unable not to feel attracted by the first woman who had shown herself struck by his personal graces, and yet aware that this was the very thing he had been warned against, and determined to make all the resistance in his power to a creature whose very beauty and enchantment gave him a sense of discomfort.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONVENT BIRD.

> "Young knight, whatever that dost armes professe,
> And through long labours huntest after fame,
> Beware of fraud, beware of ficklenesse,
> In choice and change of thy beloved dame."
>
> SPENSER, *Faëry Queene.*

BERENGER'S mind was relieved, even while his vanity was mortified, when the Chevalier and his son came the next day to bring him the formal letter requesting the Pope's annulment of his marriage. After he had signed it, it was to be taken to Eustacie, and, so soon as he should attain his twenty-first year he was to dispose of Château Leurre, as well as of his claim to the ancestral castle in Picardy, to his cousin Narcisse, and thus become entirely free to transfer his allegiance to the Queen of England.

It was a very good thing—that he well knew; and he had a strong sense of virtue and obedience, as he formed with his pen the words in all their fulness, Henri Béranger Eustache, Baron de Ribaumont et Seigneur de Leurre. He could not help wondering whether the lady who looked at him so admiringly really preferred such a mean-looking little fop as Narcisse, whether she were afraid of his English home and breeding, or whether all this open coquetry were really the court manners of ladies towards gentlemen, and he had been

an absolute simpleton to be flattered. Any way, she would have been a most undesirable wife, and he was well quit of her; but he did feel a certain lurking desire that, since the bonds were cut and he was no longer in danger from her, he might see her again, carry home a mental inventory of the splendid beauties he had renounced, and decide what was the motive that actuated her in rejecting his own handsome self. Meantime, he proceeded to enjoy the amusements and advantage of his sojourn at Paris, of which by no means the least was the society of Philip Sidney, and the charm his brilliant genius imparted to every pursuit they shared. Books at the University, fencing and dancing from the best professors, Italian poetry, French sonnets, Latin epigrams; nothing came amiss to Sidney, the flower of English youth: and Berenger had taste, intelligence, and cultivation enough to enter into all in which Sidney led the way. The good tutor, after all his miseries on the journey, was delighted to write to Lord Walwyn, that, far from being a risk and temptation, this visit was a school in all that was virtuous and comely.

If the good man had any cause of dissatisfaction, it was with the Calvinistic tendencies of the Ambassador's household. Walsingham was always on the Puritanical side of Elizabeth's court, and such an atmosphere as that of Paris, where the Roman Catholic system was at that time showing more corruption than it has ever done before or since in any other place, naturally threw him into sympathy with the Reformed. The reaction that half a century later filled the Gallican Church with saintliness had not set in; her ecclesiastics were the tools of a wicked and bloodthirsty court, who hated virtue as much as schism in the men whom they persecuted. The Huguenots were for the most part men whose instincts for truth and virtue had recoiled from the popular system, and thus it was indeed as if piety and

morality were arrayed on one side, and superstition and debauchery on the other. Mr. Adderley thus found the tone of the ambassador's chaplain that of far more complete fellowship with the Reformed pastors than he himself was disposed to admit. There were a large number of these gathered at Paris; for the lull in persecution that had followed the battle of Moncontour had given hopes of a final accommodation between the two parties, and many had come up to consult with the numerous lay nobility who had congregated to witness the King of Navarre's wedding. Among them, Berenger met his father's old friend, Isaac Gardon, who had come to Paris for the purpose of giving his only surviving son in marriage to the daughter of a watchmaker to whom he had for many years been betrothed. By him the youth, with his innocent face and gracious respectful manners, was watched with delight, as fulfilling the fairest hopes of the poor Baron, but the old minister would have been sorely disappointed had he known how little Berenger felt inclined towards his party.

The royal one of course Berenger could not love, but the rigid bareness, and, as he thought, irreverence of the Calvinist, and the want of all forms, jarred upon one used to a ritual which retained much of the ancient form. In the early years of Elizabeth, every possible diversity prevailed in parish churches, according to the predilections of rector and squire; from forms scarcely altered from those of old times, down to the baldest, rudest neglect of all rites; and Berenger, in his country home, had been used to the first extreme. He could not believe that what he heard and saw among the *Sacrêmentaires*, as they were called, was what his father had prized; and he greatly scandalised Sidney, the pupil of Hubert Languet, by openly expressing his distaste and dismay when he found their worship viewed by both

Walsingham and Sidney as a model to which the English Protestants ought to be brought.

However, Sidney excused all this as mere boyish distaste to sermons and love of externals, and Berenger himself reflected little on the subject. The aspect of the venerable Coligny, his father's friend, did far more towards making him a Huguenot than any discussion of doctrine. The good old Admiral received him affectionately, and talked to him warmly of his father, and the grave, noble countenance and kind manner won his heart. Great projects were on foot, and were much relished by the young King, for raising an army and striking a blow at Spain by aiding the Reformed in the Netherlands; and Coligny was as ardent as a youth in the cause, hoping at once to aid his brethren, to free the young King from evil influences, and to strike one good stroke against the old national enemy. He talked eagerly to Sidney of alliances with England, and then lamented over the loss of so promising a youth as young Ribaumont to the Reformed cause in France. If the marriage with the heiress could have taken effect, he would have obtained estates near enough to some of the main Huguenot strongholds to be very important, and these would now remain under the power of Narcisse de Ribaumont, a determined ally of the Guise faction, It was a pity, but the Admiral could not blame the youth for obeying the wish of his guardian grandfather; and he owned, with a sigh, that England was a more peaceful land than his own beloved country. Berenger was a little nettled at this implication, and began to talk of joining the French standard in a campaign in the Netherlands: but when the two young men returned to their present home and described the conversation, Walsingham said,—

"The Admiral's favourite project! He would do wisely not to brag of it so openly. The King of Spain has too

many in his interest in this place not to be warned, and to be thus further egged on to compass the ruin of Coligny."

"I should have thought," said Sidney, "that nothing could add to his hatred of the Reformed."

"Scarcely," said Walsingham; "save that it is they who hinder the Duke of Guise from being a good Frenchman, and a foe to Spain."

Politics had not developed themselves in Berenger's mind, and he listened inattentively while Walsingham talked over with Sidney the state of parties in France, where natural national enmity to Spain was balanced by the need felt by the Queen-mother of the support of that great Roman Catholic power against the Huguenots; whom Walsingham believed her to dread and hate less for their own sake than from the fear of loss of influence over her son. He believed Charles IX. himself to have much leaning towards the Reformed, but the late victories had thrown the whole court entirely into the power of the Guises, the truly unscrupulous partisans of Rome. They were further inflamed against the Huguenots by the assassination of the last Duke of Guise, and by the violences that had been committed by some of the Reformed party, in especial a massacre of prisoners at Nérac.

Sidney exclaimed that the Huguenots had suffered far worse cruelties.

"That is true," replied Sir Francis, "but, my young friend, you will find, in all matters of reprisals, that a party has no memory for what it may commit, only for what it may receive."

The conversation was interrupted by an invitation to the ambassador's family and guests to a tilting-match and subsequent ball at the Louvre. In the first Berenger did his part with credit; to the second he went feeling full of that strange attraction of repulsion. He knew gentlemen enough in Coligny's suite for it to be likely that he might remain

unperceived among them, and he knew this would be prudent, but he found himself unexpectedly near the ranks of ladies, and smile and gesture absolutely drew him towards his semi-spouse, so that he had no alternative but to lead her out to dance.

The stately measure was trod in silence as usual, but he felt the dark eyes studying him all the time. However, he could bear it better now that the deed was done, and she had voluntarily made him less to her than any gallant parading or mincing about the room."

"So you bear the pearls, sir?" she said, as the dance finished.

"The only heirloom I shall take with me," he said.

"Is a look at them too great a favour to ask from their jealous guardian?" she asked.

He smiled, half ashamed of his own annoyance at being obliged to place them in her hands. He was sure she would try to cajole him out of them, and by way of asserting his property in them he did not detach them from the band of his black velvet cap, but gave it with them into her hand. She looked at each one, and counted them wistfully.

"Seventeen!" she said; "and how beautiful! I never saw them so near before. They are so becoming to that fair cheek that I suppose no offer from my—my uncle, on our behalf, would induce you to part with them?"

An impulse of open-handed gallantry would have made him answer, "No offer from your uncle, but a simple request from you;" but he thought in time of the absurdity of returning without them, and merely answered, "I have no right to yield them, fair lady. They are the witness to my forefather's fame and prowess."

"Yes, sir, and to those of mine also," she replied. "And you would take them over to the enemy from whom that prowess extorted them?"

"The country which honoured and rewarded that prowess!" replied Berenger.

She looked at him with an interrogative glance of surprise at the readiness of his answer; then, with half a sigh, said, "There are your pearls, sir; I cannot establish our right, though I verily believe it was the cause of our last quarrel;" and she smiled archly.

"I believe it was," he said, gravely; but added, in the moment of relief at recovering the precious heirloom, "though it was Diane who inspired you to seize upon them."

"Ah! poor Diane! you sometimes recollect her then? If I remember right, you used to agree with her better than with your little spouse, cousin!"

"If I quarrelled with her less, I liked her less," answered Berenger—who, since the act of separation, had not been so guarded in his demeanour, and began to give way to his natural frankness.

"Indeed! Diane would be less gratified than I ought to be. And why, may I ask?"

"Diane was more caressing, but she had no truth."

"Truth! that was what *feu* M. le Baron ever talked of; what Huguenots weary one with."

"And the only thing worth seeking, the real pearl," said Berenger, "without which all else is worthless."

"Ah!" she said, "who would have thought that soft, youthful face could be so severe! You would never forgive a deceit?"

"Never," he said, with the crystal hardness of youth; "or rather I might forgive; I could never esteem."

"What a bare, rude world yours must be," she said, shivering. "And no weak ones in it! Only the strong can dare to be true."

"Truth is strength!" said Berenger. "For example: I

see yonder a face without bodily strength, perhaps, but with perfect candour."

"Ah! some Huguenot girl of Madame Catherine's, no doubt—from the depths of Languedoc, and dressed like a fright."

"No, no; the young girl behind the pale, yellow-haired lady."

"*Comment*, Monsieur. Do you not yet know the young Queen?"

"But who is the young demoiselle!—she with the superb black eyes, and the ruby rose in her black hair?"

"Take care, sir, do you not know I have still a right to be jealous?" she said, blushing, bridling, and laughing.

But this pull on the cords made him the more resolved; he would not be turned from his purpose. "Who is she?" he repeated, "have I ever seen her before? I am sure I remember that innocent look of *espiéglerie*."

"You may see it on any child's face fresh out of the convent; it does not last a month!" was the still displeased, rather jealous answer. "That little thing—I believe they call her Nid-de-Merle—she has only just been brought from her nunnery to wait on the young Queen. Ah! your gaze was perilous, it is bringing on you one of the jests of Madame Marguerite."

With laughter and gaiety, a troop of gentlemen descended on M. de Ribaumont, and told him that Madame Marguerite desired that he should be presented to her. The princess was standing by her pale sister-in-law, Elizabeth of Austria, who looked grave and annoyed at the mischievous mirth flashing in Marguerite's dark eyes.

"M. de Ribaumont," said the latter, her very neck heaving with suppressed fun, "I see I cannot do you a greater favour than by giving you Mademoiselle de Nid-de-Merle for your partner."

Berenger was covered with confusion to find that he had been guilty of such a fixed stare as to bring all this upon the poor girl. He feared that his vague sense of recognition had made his gaze more open than he knew, and he was really and deeply ashamed of this as his worst act of provincial ill-breeding.

Poor little convent maid, with crimson cheeks, flashing eyes, panting bosom, and a neck evidently aching with proud dignity and passion, she received his low bow with a sweeping curtsey, as lofty as her little person would permit.

His cheeks burnt like fire, and he would have found words to apologize, but she cut him short by saying, hastily and low, "Not a word, Monsieur! Let us go through it at once. No one shall make game of us."

He hardly durst look at her again; but as he went through his own elaborate paces he knew that the little creature opposite was swimming, bending, turning, bounding with the fluttering fierceness of an angry little bird, and that the superb eyes were casting flashes on him that seemed to carry him back to days of early boyhood.

Once he caught a mortified, pleading, wistful glance that made him feel as if he had inflicted a cruel injury by his thoughtless gaze, and he resolved to plead the sense of recognition in excuse; but no sooner was the performance over than she prevented all conversation by saying, "Lead me back at once to the Queen, sir; she is about to retire." They were already so near that there was not time to say anything; he could only hold as lightly as possible the tiny fingers that he felt burning and quivering in his hand, and then, after bringing her to the side of the chair of state, he was forced to release her with the mere whisper of "Pardon, Mademoiselle;" and the request was not replied to, save by the additional stateliness of her curtsey.

It was already late, and the party was breaking up; but his head and heart were still in a whirl when he found himself seated in the ambassadorial coach, hearing Lady Walsingham's well-pleased rehearsal of all the compliments she had received on the distinguished appearance of both her young guests. Sidney, as the betrothed of her daughter, was property of her own; but she also exulted in the praises of the young Lord de Ribaumont, as proving the excellence of the masters whom she had recommended to remove the rustic clownishness of which he had been accused.

"Nay," said Sir Francis; "whoever called him too clownish for court spake with design."

The brief sentence added to Berenger's confused sense of being in a mist of false play. Could his kinsman be bent on keeping him from court? Could Narcisse be jealous of him? Mademoiselle de Ribaumont was evidently inclined to seek him, and her cousin might easily think her lands safer in his absence. He would have been willing to hold aloof as much as his uncle and cousin could wish, save for an angry dislike to being duped and cajoled; and, moreover, a strong curiosity to hear and see more of that little passionate bird, fresh from the convent cage. Her gesture and her eyes irresistibly carried him back to old times, though whether to an angry blackbird in the yew-tree alleys at Leurre, or to the eager face that had warned him to save his father, he could not remember with any distinctness. At any rate, he was surprised to find himself thinking so little in comparison about the splendid beauty and winning manners of his discarded spouse, though he quite believed that, now her captive was beyond her grasp, she was disposed to catch at him again, and try to retain him, or, as his titillated vanity might whisper, his personal graces might make her regret the family resolution which she had obeyed.

CHAPTER VI.

FOULLY COZENED.

"I was the more deceived."—*Hamlet.*

The unhappy Charles IX. had a disposition that in good hands might have achieved great nobleness; and though cruelly bound and trained to evil, was no sooner allowed to follow its natural bent than it reached out eagerly towards excellence. At this moment, it was his mother's policy to appear to leave the ascendency to the Huguenot party, and he was therefore allowed to contract friendships which deceived the intended victims the more completely, because his admiration and attachment were spontaneous and sincere. Philip Sidney's varied accomplishments and pure lofty character greatly attracted the young King, who had leant on his arm conversing during great part of the ball, and the next morning sent a royal messenger to invite the two young gentlemen to a party at pall-mall in the Tuileries gardens.

Pall-mall was either croquet or its nearest relative, and was so much the fashion that games were given in order to keep up political influence, perhaps, because the freedom of a garden pastime among groves and bowers afforded opportunities for those seductive arts on which Queen Catherine placed so much dependence. The formal gardens, with their

squares of level turf and clipped alleys, afforded excellent scope both for players and spectators, and numerous games had been set on foot, from all of which, however, Berenger contrived to exclude himself, in his restless determination to find out the little Demoiselle de Nid-de-Merle, or, at least, to discover whether any intercourse in early youth accounted for his undefined sense of remembrance.

He interrogated the first disengaged person he could find, but it was only the young Abbé de Méricour, who had been newly brought up from Dauphiné by his elder brother to solicit a benefice, and who knew nobody. To him, ladies were only bright phantoms such as his books had taught him to regard like the temptations of St. Anthony, but whom he actually saw treated with as free admiration by the ecclesiastic as by the layman.

Suddenly a clamour of voices arose on the other side of the closely-clipped wall of limes by which the two youths were walking. There were the clear tones of a young maiden expostulating in indignant distress, and the bantering, indolent determination of a male annoyer.

"Hark!" exclaimed Berenger; "this must be seen to."

"Have a care," returned Méricour; "I have heard that a man needs look twice ere meddling."

Scarcely hearing, Berenger strode on as he had done at the last village wake, when he had rescued Cis of the Down from the impertinence of a Dorchester scrivener. It was a like case, he saw, when breaking through the arch of clipped limes he beheld the little Demoiselle de Nid-de-Merle, driven into a corner and standing at bay, with glowing cheeks, flashing eyes, and hands clasped over her breast, while a young man, dressed in the extreme of foppery, was assuring her that she was the only lady who had not granted him a token—that he could not allow such *pensionnaire* airs, and that now

he had caught her he would have his revenge, and win her rose-coloured breastknot. Another gentleman stood by, laughing, and keeping guard in the walk that led to the more frequented part of the gardens.

"Hold!" thundered Berenger.

The assailant had just mastered the poor girl's hand, but she took advantage of his surprise to wrench it away and gather herself up as for a spring, but the Abbé in dismay, the attendant in anger, cried out, "Stay—it is Monsieur."

"Monsieur; be he who he may," exclaimed Berenger, "no honest man can see a lady insulted."

"Are you mad?" It is Monsieur the Duke of Anjou," said Méricour, pouncing on his arm.

"Shall we have him to the guardhouse?" added the attendant, coming up on the other side; but Henri de Valois waved them both back, and burst into a derisive laugh. "No, no; do you not see who it is? Monsieur the English Baron still holds the end of the halter. His sale is not yet made. Come away, D'O, he will soon have enough on his hands without us. Farewell, fair lady, another time you will be free of your jealous giant."

So saying, the Duke of Anjou strolled off, feigning indifference and contempt, and scarcely heeding that he had been traversed in one of the malicious adventures which he delighted to recount in public before the discomfited victim herself, often with shameful exaggeration.

The girl clasped her hands over her brow with a gesture of dismay, and cried, "Oh! if you have only not touched your sword."

"Let me have the honour of reconducting you, Mademoiselle," said Berenger, offering his hand; but after the first sigh of relief, a tempestuous access seized her. She seemed about to dash away his hand, her bosom swelled with resent-

ment, and with a voice striving for dignity, though choked with strangled tears, she exclaimed, "No, indeed! Had not M. le Baron forsaken me, I had never been thus treated!" and her eyes flashed through their moisture.

"Eustacie! You are Eustacie!"

"Whom would you have me to be otherwise? I have the honour to wish M. le Baron a good morning."

"Eustacie! Stay! Hear me! It concerns my honour. I see it is you—but whom have I seen? Who was she?" he cried, half wild with dismay and confusion. "Was it Diane?"

"You have seen and danced with Diane de Ribaumont," answered Eustacie, still coldly; "but what of that? Let me go, Monsieur; you have cast me off already."

"I! when all this has been of your own seeking?"

"Mine?" cried Eustacie, panting with the struggle between her dignity and her passionate tears. "I meddled not. I heard that M. le Baron was gone to a strange land, and had written to break off old ties." Her face was in a flame, and her efforts for composure absolute pain.

"I!" again exclaimed Berenger. "The first letter came from your uncle, declaring that it was your wish!" And as her face changed rapidly, "Then it was not true! He has not had your consent?"

"What! would I hold to one who despised me—who came here and never even asked to see this hated spouse!"

"I did! I entreated to see you. I would not sign the application till—Oh, there has been treachery! And have they made you too sign it?"

"When they showed me your name they were welcome to mine."

Berenger struck his forehead with wrath and perplexity, then cried, joyfully, "It will not stand for a moment. So

foul a cheat can be at once exposed. Eustacie, you know—you understand, that it was not you but Diane whom I saw and detested; and no wonder, when she was acting such a cruel treason!"

"Oh no, Diane would never so treat me," cried Eustacie. "I see how it was! You did not know that my father was latterly called Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, and when they brought me here, they *would* call me after him: they said a maid of honour must be Demoiselle, and my uncle said there was only one way in which I could remain Madame de Ribaumont! And the name must have deceived you. Thou wast always a great dull boy," she added, with a sudden assumption of childish intimacy that annihilated the nine years since their parting.

"Had I seen thee, I had not mistaken for an instant. This little face stirred my heart; hers repelled me. And she deceived me wittingly, Eustacie, for I asked after her by name."

"Ah, she wished to spare my embarrassment. And then her brother must have dealt with her."

"I see," exclaimed Berenger, "I am to be palmed off thus that thou mayest be reserved for Narcisse. Tell me, Eustacie, wast thou willing?"

"I hate Narcisse!" she cried. "But oh, I am lingering too long. Monsieur will make some hateful tale! I never fell into his way before, my Queen and Madame la Comtesse are so careful. Only to-day, as I was attending her alone, the King came and gave her his arm, and I had to drop behind. I must find her; I shall be missed," she added, in sudden alarm. "Oh, what will they say?"

"No blame for being with thy husband," he answered, clasping her hand. "Thou art mine henceforth. I will soon cut our way out of the web thy treacherous kindred have woven. Meantime——"

"Hush! There are voices," cried Eustacie in terror, and, guided by something he could not discern, she fled with the swiftness of a bird down the alley. Following, with the utmost speed that might not bear the appearance of pursuit, he found that on coming to the turn she had moderated her pace, and was more tranquilly advancing to a bevy of ladies, who sat perched on the stone steps like great butterflies sunning themselves, watching the game, and receiving the attentions of their cavaliers. He saw her absorbed into the group, and then began to prowl round it, in the alleys, in a tumult of amazement and indignation. He had been shamefully deceived and cheated, and justice he would have! He had been deprived of a thing of his own, and he would assert his right. He had been made to injure and disown the creature he was bound to protect, and he must console her and compensate to her, were it only to redeem his honour. He never even thought whether he loved her; he merely felt furious at the wrong he had suffered and been made to commit, and hotly bent on recovering what belonged to him. He might even have plunged down among the ladies and claimed her as his wife, if the young Abbé de Méricour, who was two years older than he, and far less of a boy for his years, had not joined him in his agitated walk. He then learnt that all the Court knew that the daughter of the late Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, Comte de Ribaumont, was called by his chief title, but that her marriage to himself had been forgotten by some and unknown to others, and thus that the first error between the cousins had not been wonderful in a stranger, since the Chevalier's daughter had always been Mdlle. de Ribaumont. The error once made, Berenger's distaste to Diane had been so convenient that it had been carefully encouraged, and the desire to keep him at a distance from Court and throw him into the background

was accounted for. The Abbé was almost as indignant as Berenger, and assured him both of his sympathy and his discretion.

"I see no need for discretion," said Berenger. "I shall claim my wife in the face of the sun."

"Take counsel first, I entreat," exclaimed Méricour. "The Ribaumonts have much influence with the Guise family, and now you have offended Monsieur."

"Ah! where are those traitorous kinsmen?" cried Berenger.

"Fortunately all are gone on an expedition with the Queen-mother. You will have time to think. I have heard my brother say no one ever prospered who offended the meanest follower of the house of Lorraine."

"I do not want prosperity, I only want my wife. I hope I shall never see Paris and its deceivers again."

"Ah! but is it true that you have applied to have the marriage annulled at Rome?"

"We were both shamefully deceived. That can be nothing."

"A decree of his Holiness: you a Huguenot; she an heiress. All is against you. My friend, be cautious," exclaimed the young ecclesiastic, alarmed by his passionate gestures. "To break forth now and be accused of brawling in the palace precincts would be fatal — fatal — most fatal!"

"I am as calm as possible," returned Berenger. "I mean to act most reasonably. I shall stand before the King and tell him openly how I have been tampered with, demanding my wife before the whole Court."

"Long before you could get so far the ushers would have dragged you away for brawling, or for maligning an honourable gentleman. You would have to finish your speech in

the Bastille, and it would be well if even your English friends could get you out alive."

"Why, what a place is this!" began Berenger; but again Méricour entreated him to curb himself; and his English education had taught him to credit the house of Guise with so much mysterious power and wickedness, that he allowed himself to be silenced, and promised to take no open measures till he had consulted the Ambassador.

He could not obtain another glimpse of Eustacie, and the hours passed tardily till the break up of the party. Charles could scarcely release Sidney from his side, and only let him go on condition that he should join the next day in an expedition to the hunting château of Montpipeau, to which the King seemed to look forward as a great holiday and breathing time.

When at length the two youths did return, Sir Francis Walsingham was completely surprised by the usually tractable, well-behaved stripling, whose praises he had been writing to his old friend, bursting in on him with the outcry, "Sir, sir, I entreat your counsel! I have been foully cozened."

"Of how much?" said Sir Francis, in a tone of reprobation.

"Of my wife. Of mine honour. Sir, your Excellency, I crave pardon, if I spoke too hotly," said Berenger, collecting himself; "but it is enough to drive a man to frenzy."

"Sit down, my Lord de Ribaumont. Take breath, and let me know what is this coil. What hath thus moved him, Mr. Sidney?"

"It is as he says, sir," replied Sidney, who had heard all as they returned; "he has been greatly wronged. The Chevalier de Ribaumont not only writ to propose the separation without the lady's knowledge, but imposed his own daughter on our friend as the wife he had not seen since infancy."

"There, sir," broke forth Berenger; "surely if I claim mine own in the face of day, no man can withhold her from me!"

"Hold!" said Sir Francis. "What means this passion, young sir? Methought you came hither convinced that both the religion and the habits in which the young lady had been bred up rendered your infantine contract most unsuitable. What hath fallen out to make this change in your mind?"

"That I was cheated, sir. The lady who palmed herself off on me as my wife was a mere impostor, the Chevalier's own daughter!"

"That may be; but what know you of this other lady? Has she been bred up in faith or manners such as your parents would have your wife?"

"She is my wife," reiterated Berenger. "My faith is plighted to her. That is enough for me."

Sir Francis made a gesture of despair. "He has seen her, I suppose," said he to Sidney.

"Yes truly, sir," answered Berenger; "and found that she had been as greatly deceived as myself."

"Then mutual consent is wanting," said the statesman, gravely musing.

"That is even as I say," began Berenger, but Walsingham held up his hand, and desired that he would make his full statement in the presence of his tutor. Then sounding a little whistle, the ambassador despatched a page to request the attendance of Mr. Adderley, and recommended young Ribaumont in the meantime to compose himself.

Used to being under authority as Berenger was, the somewhat severe tone did much to allay his excitement, and remind him that right and reason were so entirely on his side, that he had only to be cool and rational to make them prevail. He was thus able to give a collected and coherent

account of his discovery that the part of his wife had been assumed by her cousin Diane, and that the signature of both the young pair to the application to the Pope had been obtained on false pretences. That he had, as Sidney said, been foully cozened, in both senses of the word, was as clear as daylight; but he was much angered and disappointed to find that neither the ambassador nor his tutor could see that Eustacie's worthiness was proved by the iniquity of her relations, or that any one of the weighty reasons for the expediency of dissolving the marriage was removed. The whole affair had been in such good train a little before, that Mr. Adderley was much distressed that it should thus have been crossed, and thought the new phase of affairs would be far from acceptable at Combe Walwyn.

"Whatever is just and honourable must be acceptable to my grandfather," said Berenger.

"Even so," said Walsingham; "but it were well to consider whether justice and honour require you to overthrow the purpose wherewith he sent you hither."

"Surely, sir, justice and honour require me to fulfil a contract to which the other party is constant," said Berenger, feeling very wise and prudent for calling that wistful, indignant creature the other party.

"That is also true," said the ambassador, "provided she be constant; but you own that she signed the requisition for the dissolution."

"She did so, but under the same deception as myself, and further mortified and aggrieved at my seeming faithlessness."

"So it may easily be represented," muttered Walsingham.

"How, sir?" cried Berenger, impetuously; "do you doubt her truth?"

"Heaven forefend," said Sir Francis, "that I should discuss any fair lady's sincerity! The question is how far

you are bound. Have I understood you that you are veritably wedded, not by a mere contract of espousal?"

Berenger could produce no documents, for they had been left at Château Leurre, and on his father's death the Chevalier had claimed the custody of them; but he remembered enough of the ceremonial to prove that the wedding had been a veritable one, and that only the papal intervention could annul it.

Indeed an Englishman, going by English law, would own no power in the Pope, nor any one on earth, to sever the sacred tie of wedlock; but French courts of law would probably ignore the mode of application, and would certainly endeavour to separate between a Catholic and a heretic.

"I am English, sir, in heart and faith," said Berenger, earnestly. "Look upon me as such, and tell me, am I married or single at this moment?"

"Married assuredly. More's the pity," said Sir Francis.

"And no law of God or man divides us without our own consent." There was no denying that the mutual consent of the young pair at their present age was all that was wanting to complete the inviolability of their marriage contract.

Berenger was indeed only eighteen, and Eustacie more than a year younger, but there was nothing in their present age to invalidate their marriage, for persons of their rank were usually wedded quite as young or younger. Walsingham was only concerned at his old friend's disappointment, and at the danger of the young man running headlong into a connexion probably no more suitable than that with Diane de Ribaumont would have been. But it was not convenient to argue against the expediency of a man's loving his own wife; and when Berenger boldly declared he was not talking of love but of justice, it was only possible to insist that he should pause and see where true justice lay.

And thus the much perplexed ambassador broke up the conference with his hot and angry young guest.

"And Mistress Lucy——?" sighed Mr. Adderley, in rather an *inapropos* fashion it must be owned; but then he had been fretted beyond endurance by his pupil striding up and down his room, reviling Diane, and describing Eustacie, while he was trying to write these uncomfortable tidings to Lord Walwyn.

"Lucy! What makes you bring her up to me?" exclaimed Berenger. "Little Dolly would be as much to the purpose!"

"Only, sir, no resident at Hurst Walwyn could fail to know what has been planned and desired."

"Pshaw!" cried Berenger; "have you not heard that it was a mere figment, and that I could scarce have wedded Lucy safely, even had this matter gone as you wish. This is the luckiest chance that could have befallen her."

"That may be," said Mr. Adderley; "I wish she may think so—sweet young lady!"

"I tell you, Mr. Adderley, you should know better! Lucy has more sense. My aunt, whom she follows more than any other creature, ever silenced the very sport or semblance of love passages between us even as children, by calling them unseemly in one wedded as I am. Brother and sister we have ever been, and have loved as such—aye, and shall! I know of late some schemes have crossed my mother's mind—"

"Yea, and that of others."

"But they have not ruffled Lucy's quiet nature—trust me! And for the rest? What doth she need of me in comparison of this poor child? She—like a bit of her own grey lavender in the shadiest nook of the walled garden, tranquil there—sure not to be taken there, save to company with fine linen in some trim scented coffer, whilst this fresh

glowing rosebud has grown up pure and precious in the very midst of the foulest corruption Christendom can show, and if I snatch her not from it, I, the only living man who can, look you, in the very bloom of her innocence and sweetness, what is to be her fate? The very pity of a Christian, the honour of a gentleman, would urge me, even if it were not my most urgent duty!"

Mr. Adderley argued no more. When Berenger came to his duty in the matter he was invincible, and moreover all the more provoking, because he mentioned it with a sort of fiery sound of relish, and looked so very boyish all the time. Poor Mr. Adderley! feeling as if his trust were betrayed, loathing the very idea of a French Court lady, saw that his pupil had been allured into a headlong passion to his own misery, and that of all whose hopes were set on him, yet preached to by this stripling scholar about duties and sacred obligations! Well might he rue the day he ever set foot in Paris.

Then, to his further annoyance, came a royal messenger to invite the Baron de Ribaumont to join the expedition to Montpipeau. Of course he must go, and his tutor must be left behind, and who could tell into what mischief he might not be tempted!

Here, however, Sidney gave the poor chaplain some comfort. He believed that no ladies were to be of the party, and that the gentlemen were chiefly of the King's new friends among the Huguenots, such as Coligny, his son-in-law Teligny, Rochefoucauld, and the like, among whom the young gentleman could not fall into any very serious harm, and might very possibly be influenced against a Roman Catholic wife. At any rate, he would be out of the way, and unable to take any dangerous steps.

This same consideration so annoyed Berenger that he

would have declined the invitation, if royal invitations could have been declined. And in the morning, before setting out, he dressed himself point device, and with Osbert behind him marched down to the Croix de Lorraine, to call upon the Chevalier de Ribaumont. He had a very fine speech at his tongue's end when he set out, but a good deal of it had evaporated when he reached the hotel, and perhaps he was not very sorry not to find the old gentleman within.

On his return, he indited a note to the Chevalier, explaining that he had now seen his wife, Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont, and had come to an understanding with her, by which he found that it was under a mistake that the application to the Pope had been signed, and that they should, therefore, follow it up with a protest, and act as if no such letter had been sent.

Berenger showed this letter to Walsingham, who, though much concerned, could not forbid his sending it. "Poor lad," he said to the tutor; "'tis an excellently writ billet for one so young. I would it were in a wiser cause. But he has fairly the bit between his teeth, and there is no checking him while he has this show of right on his side."

And poor Mr. Adderley could only beseech Mr. Sidney to take care of him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN'S PASTORAL.

"Either very gravely gay,
Or very gaily grave."
W. M. Praed.

Montpipeau, though in the present day a suburb of Paris, was in the sixteenth century far enough from the city to form a sylvan retreat, where Charles IX. could snatch a short respite from the intrigues of his Court, under pretext of enjoying his favourite sport. Surrounded with his favoured associates of the Huguenot party, he seemed to breathe a purer atmosphere, and to yield himself up to enjoyment greater than perhaps his sad life had ever known.

He rode among his gentlemen, and the brilliant cavalcade passed through poplar-shaded roads, clattered through villages, and threaded their way through bits of forest still left for the royal chase. The people thronged out of their houses, and shouted not only "Vive le Roy," but "Vive l'Amiral," and more than once the cry was added, "Spanish war, or civil war!" The heart of France was, if not with the Reformed, at least against Spain and the Lorrainers, and Sidney perceived, from the conversation of the gentlemen round him, that the present expedition had been devised less for the sake of the sport, than to enable the King to take measures for emancipating himself from the thraldom of his mother,

and engaging the country in a war against Philip II. Sidney listened, but Berenger chafed, feeling only that he was being further carried out of reach of his explanation with his kindred. And thus they arrived at Montpipeau, a tower, tall and narrow, like all French designs, but expanded on the ground floor by wooden buildings capable of containing the numerous train of a royal hunter, and surrounded by an extent of waste land, without fine trees, though with covert for deer, boars, and wolves sufficient for sport to royalty and death to peasantry. Charles seemed to sit more erect in his saddle, and to drink in joy with every breath of the thyme-scented breeze, from the moment his horse bounded on the hollow-sounding turf; and when he leapt to the ground, with the elastic spring of youth, he held out his hands to Sidney and to Teligny, crying "Welcome, my friends. Here I am indeed a king!"

It was a lovely summer evening, early in August, and Charles bade the supper to be spread under the elms that shaded a green lawn in front of the château. Etiquette was here so far relaxed as to permit the sovereign to dine with his suite, and tables, chairs, and benches were brought out, drapery festooned in the trees to keep off sun and wind, the King lay down in the fern and let his happy dogs fondle him, and as a herd-girl passed along a vista in the distance, driving her goats before her, Philip Sidney marvelled whether it was not even thus in Arcadia.

Presently there was a sound of horses trampling, wheels moving, a party of gaily gilded archers of the guard jingled up, and in their midst was a coach. Berenger's heart seemed to leap at once to his lips, as a glimpse of ruffs, hats, and silks dawned on him through the windows.

The King rose from his lair among the fern, the Admiral stood forward, all heads were bared, and from the coach-door

alighted the young Queen; no longer pale, subdued, and indifferent, but with a face shining with girlish delight, as she held out her hand to the Admiral. "Ah! this is well, this is beautiful," she exclaimed; "it is like our happy chaces in the Tyrol. Ah, Sire!" to the King, "how I thank you for letting me be with you."

After her Majesty descended her gentleman-usher. Then came the lady-in-waiting, Madame de Sauve, the wife of the state secretary in attendance on Charles, and a triumphant, coquettish beauty, then a fat, good-humoured Austrian dame, always called Madame la Comtesse, because her German name was unpronounceable, and without whom the Queen never stirred, and lastly a little figure, rounded yet slight, slender yet soft and plump, with a kitten-like alertness and grace of motion, as she sprang out, collected the Queen's properties of fan, kerchief, pouncet-box, mantle, &c., and disappeared into the château, without Berenger's being sure of anything but that her little black hat had a rose-coloured feather in it.

The Queen was led to a chair placed under one of the largest trees, and there Charles presented to her such of his gentlemen as she was not yet acquainted with, the Baron de Ribaumont among the rest.

"I have heard of M. de Ribaumont," she said, in a tone that made the colour mantle in his fair cheek, and with a sign of her hand she detained him at her side till the King had strolled away with Madame la Sauve, and no one remained near but her German countess. Then changing her tone to one of confidence, which the highbred homeliness of her Austrian manner rendered inexpressibly engaging, she said, "I must apologize, monsieur, for the giddiness of my sister-in-law, which I fear caused you some embarrassment."

"Ah, madame," said Berenger, kneeling on one knee as she

addressed him, and his heart bounding with wild, undefined hope; "I cannot be grateful enough. It was that which led to my being undeceived."

"It was true, then, that you were mistaken?" said the Queen.

"Treacherously deceived, madame, by those whose interest it is to keep us apart," said Berenger, colouring with indignation; "they imposed my other cousin on me as my wife, and caused her to think me cruelly neglectful."

"I know," said the Queen. "Yet Mdlle. de Ribaumont is far more admired than my little blackbird."

"That may be, madame, but not by me."

"Yet is it true that you came to break off the marriage?"

"Yes, madame," said Berenger, honestly, "but I had not seen her."

"And now?" said the Queen, smiling.

"I would rather die than give her up," said Berenger. "Oh, madame, help us of your grace. Every one is trying to part us, every one is arguing against us, but she is my own true wedded wife, and if you will but give her to me, all will be well."

"I like you, M. de Ribaumont," said the Queen, looking him full in the face. "You are like our own honest Germans at my home, and I think you mean all you say. I had much rather my dear little Nid-de-Merle were with you than left here, to become like all the others. She is a good little *Liebling*,—how do you call it in French? She has told me all, and truly I would help you with all my heart, but it is not as if I were the Queen-mother. You must have recourse to the King, who loves you well, and at my request included you in the hunting-party."

Berenger could only kiss her hand in token of earnest thanks before the repast was announced, and the King came

to lead her to the table spread beneath the trees. The whole party supped together, but Berenger could have only a distant view of his little wife, looking very demure and grave by the side of the Admiral.

But when the meal was ended, there was a loitering in the woodland paths, amid heathy openings or glades trimmed into discreet wildness fit for royal rusticity; the sun set in parting glory on one horizon, the moon rising in crimson majesty on the other. A musician at intervals touched the guitar, and sang Spanish or Italian airs, whose soft or quaint melody came dreamily through the trees. Then it was that with beating heart Berenger stole up to the maiden as she stood behind the Queen, and ventured to whisper her name and clasp her hand.

She turned, their eyes met, and she let him lead her apart into the wood. It was not like a lover's tryst, it was more like the continuation of their old childish terms, only that he treated her as a thing of his own, that he was bound to secure and to guard, and she received him as her own lawful but tardy protector, to be treated with perfect reliance but with a certain playful resentment.

"You will not run away from me now," he said, making full prize of her hand and arm.

"Ah! is not she the dearest and best of queens?" and the large eyes were lifted up to him in such frank seeking of sympathy that he could see into the depths of their clear darkness.

"It is her doing then. Though, Eustacie, when I knew the truth, not flood nor fire should keep me long from you, my heart, my love, my wife."

"What! wife in spite of those villanous letters?" she said, trying to pout.

"Wife for ever, inseparably. Only you must be able to

swear that you knew nothing of the one that brought me here."

"Poor me! No, indeed! There was Céline carried off at fourteen, Madame de Blanchet a bride at fifteen; all marrying hither and thither; and I—" she pulled a face irresistibly droll—"I growing old enough to dress St. Catherine's hair, and wondering where was M. le Baron."

"They thought me too young," said Berenger, "to take on me the cares of life."

"So they were left to me?"

"Cares! what cares have you but finding the Queen's fan?"

"Little you know!" she said, half contemptuous, half mortified.

"Nay, pardon me, *ma mie*. Who has troubled you?"

"Ah! you would call it nothing to be beset by Narcisse; to be told one's husband is faithless, till one half believes it; to be looked at by ugly eyes; to be liable to be teased any day by Monsieur, or worse, by that mocking ape, M. d'Alençon, and to have nobody who can or will hinder it."

She was sobbing by this time, and he exclaimed, "Ah, would that I could revenge all! Never, never shall it be again! What blessed grace has guarded you through all?"

"Did I not belong to you?" she said exultingly. "And had not Sister Monique, yes, and M. le Baron striven hard to make me good? Ah, how kind he was!"

"My father? Yes, Eustacie, he loved you to the last. He bade me, on his deathbed, give you his own Book of Psalms, and tell you he had always loved and prayed for you."

"Ah! his Psalms! I shall love them! Even at Bellaise, when first we came there, we used to sing them, but the Mother Abbess went out visiting, and when she came back

she said they were heretical. And Sœur Monique would not let me say the texts he taught me, but I *would* not forget them. I say them often in my heart."

"Then," he cried joyfully, "you will willingly embrace my religion?"

"Be a Huguenot!" she said distastefully.

"I am not precisely a Huguenot; I do not love them," he answered hastily, "but all shall be made clear to you at my home in England."

"England!" she said. "Must we live in England? Away from every one?"

"Ah, they will love you so much! I shall make you so happy there," he answered. "There you will see what it is to be true and trustworthy."

"I had rather live at Château Leurre, or my own Nid-de-Merle," she replied. "There I should see Sœur Monique, and my aunt, the Abbess, and we would have the peasants to dance in the castle-court. Oh! if you could but see the orchards at Le Bocage, you would never want to go away. And we could come now and then to see my dear Queen."

"I am glad at least you would not live at Court."

"Oh, no, I have been more unhappy here than ever I knew could be borne."

And a very few words from him drew out all that had happened to her since they parted. Her father had sent her to Bellaise, a convent founded by the first of the Angevin branch, which was presided over by his sister, and where Diane was also educated. The good sister Monique had been mistress of the *pensionnaires*, and had evidently taken much pains to keep her charge innocent and devout. Diane had been taken to Court about two years before, but Eustacie had remained at the convent till some three months since, when she had been appointed maid of honour to the recently-

married Queen; and her uncle had fetched her from Anjou, and had informed her at the same time that her young husband had turned Englishman and heretic, and that after a few formalities had been complied with, she would become the wife of her cousin Narcisse. Now there was no person whom she so much dreaded as Narcisse, and when Berenger spoke of him as a feeble fop, she shuddered as though she knew him to have something of the tiger.

"Do you remember Bénoît?" she said; "poor Bénoît, who came to Normandy as my *laquais?* When I went back to Anjou he married a girl from Leurre, and went to aid his father at the farm. The poor fellow had imbibed the Baron's doctrine—he spread it. It was reported that there was a nest of Huguenots on the estate. My cousin came to break it up with his gens d'armes. O Berenger, he would hear no entreaties, he had no mercy; he let them assemble on Sunday, that they might be all together. He fired the house; shot down those who escaped; if a prisoner were made, gave him up to the Bishop's Court. Bénoît, my poor good Bénoît, who used to lead my palfrey, was first wounded, then tried, and burnt—burnt in the *place* at Luçon! I heard Narcisse laugh—laugh as he talked of the cries of the poor creatures in the conventicle. My own people, who loved me! I was but twelve years old, but even then the wretch would pay me a half-mocking courtesy, as one destined to him; and the more I disdained him and said I belonged to you, the more both he and my aunt, the Abbess, smiled, as though they had their bird in a cage; but they left me in peace till my uncle brought me to Court, and then all began again: and when they said you gave me up, I had no hope, not even of a convent. But ah, it is all over now, and I am so happy! You are grown so gentle and so beautiful, Berenger, and so much taller than I ever figured you to

myself, and you look as if you could take me up in your arms, and let no harm happen to me."

"Never, never shall it!" said Berenger, feeling all manhood, strength, and love stir within him, and growing many years in heart in that happy moment. "My sweet little faithful wife, never fear again now you are mine."

Alas! poor children. They were a good way from the security they had begun to fancy for themselves. Early the next morning, Berenger went in his straightforward way to the King, thanked him, and requested his sanction for at once producing themselves to the Court as Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont.

At this Charles swore a great oath, as one in perplexity, and bade him not go so fast.

"See here," said he, with the rude expletives only too habitual with him; "she is a pretty little girl, and she and her lands are much better with an honest man like you than with that *pendard* of a cousin; but you see he is bent on having her, and he belongs to a cut-throat crew that halt at nothing. I would not answer for your life, if you tempted him so strongly to rid himself of you."

"My own sword, Sire, can guard my life."

"Plague upon your sword! What does the foolish youth think it would do against half-a-dozen poniards and pistols in a lane black as hell's mouth?"

The foolish youth *was* thinking how could a king so full of fiery words and strange oaths bear to make such an avowal respecting his own capital and his own courtiers. All he could do was to bow and reply, "Nevertheless, Sire, at whatever risk, I cannot relinquish my wife; I would take her at once to the Ambassador's."

"How, sir!" interrupted Charles, haughtily and angrily, "if you forget that you are a French nobleman still, I

should remember it! The Ambassador may protect his own countrymen—none else."

"I entreat your Majesty's pardon," said Berenger, anxious to retract his false step. "It was your goodness and the gracious Queen's that made me hope for your sanction."

"All the sanction Charles de Valois can give is yours, and welcome," said the King, hastily. "The sanction of the King of France is another matter! To say the truth, I see no way out of the affair but an elopement."

"Sire!" exclaimed the astonished Berenger, whose strictly-disciplined education had little prepared him for such counsel.

"Look you! If I made you known as a wedded pair, the Chevalier and his son would not only assassinate you, but down on me would come my brother, and my mother, and M. de Guise, and all their crew, veritably for giving the prize out of the mouth of their satellite, but nominally for disregarding the Pope, favouring a heretical marriage, and I know not what, but, as things go here, I should assuredly get the worst of it; and if you made safely off with your prize, no one could gainsay you—I need know nothing about it—and lady and lands would be yours without dispute. You might ride off from the skirts of the forest; I would lead the hunt that way, and the three days' riding would bring you to Normandy, for you had best cross to England immediately. When she is once there, owned by your kindred, Monsieur le cousin may gnash his teeth as he will, he must make the best of it for the sake of the honour of his house, and you can safely come back and raise her people and yours to follow the Oriflamme when it takes the field against Spain. What! you are still discontented? Speak out! Plain speaking is a treat not often reserved for me."

"Sire, I am most grateful for your kindness, but I should greatly prefer going straightforward."

"Peste! Well is it said that a blundering Englishman goes always right before him! There, then! As your King on the one hand, as the friend who has brought you and your wife together, sir, it is my command that you do not compromise me and embroil greater matters than you can understand by publicly claiming this girl. Privately I will aid you to the best of my ability; publicly, I command you, for my sake, if you heed not your own, to be silent!"

Berenger sought out Sidney, who smiled at his surprise.

"Do you not see," he said, "that the King is your friend, and would be very glad to save the lady's lands from the Guisards, but that he cannot say so; he can only befriend a Huguenot by stealth."

"I would not be such a king for worlds!"

However, Eustacie was enchanted. It was like a prince and princess in Mère Perinne's fairy tales. Could they go like a shepherd and shepherdess? She had no fears—no scruples. Would she not be with her husband? It was the most charming frolic in the world. So the King seemed to think it, though he was determined to call it all the Queen's doing—the first intrigue of her own, making her like all the rest of us—the Queen's little comedy. He undertook to lead the chase as far as possible in the direction of Normandy, when the young pair might ride on to an inn, meet fresh horses, and proceed to Château Leurre, and thence to England. He would himself provide a safe conduct, which, as Berenger suggested, would represent them as a young Englishman taking home his young wife. Eustacie wanted at least to masquerade as an Englishwoman, and played off all the fragments of the language she had caught as a child, but Berenger only laughed at her, and said they just fitted the French bride. It was very pretty to laugh at Eustacie; she made such a droll pretence at pouting with

her rosebud lips, and her merry velvety eyes belied them so drolly.

Such was to be the Queen's pastoral; but when Elisabeth found the responsibility so entirely thrown on her, she began to look grave and frightened. It was no doubt much more than she had intended when she brought about the meeting between the young people, and the King, who had planned the elopement, seemed still resolved to make all appear her affair. She looked all day more like the grave, spiritless being she was at Court than like the bright young rural queen of the evening before, and she was long in her little oratory chapel in the evening. Berenger, who was waiting in the hall with the other Huguenot gentlemen, thought her devotions interminable since they delayed all her ladies. At length, however, a page came up to him, and said in a low voice, "The Queen desires the presence of M. le Baron de Ribaumont."

He followed the messenger, and found himself in the little chapel, before a gaily-adorned altar, and numerous little shrines and niches round. Sidney would have dreaded a surreptitious attempt to make him conform, but Berenger had no notion of such perils,—he only saw that Eustacie was standing by the Queen's chair; the King sat carelessly, perhaps a little sullenly, in another chair, and a kindly-looking Austrian priest, the Queen's confessor, held a book in his hand.

The Queen came to meet him. "For my sake," she said, with all her sweetness, "to ease my mind, I should like to see my little Eustacie made entirely your own ere you go. Father Meinhard tells me it is safer that, when the parties were under twelve years old, the troth should be again exchanged. No other ceremony is needed."

"I desire nothing but to have her made indissolubly my own," said Berenger, bowing.

"And the King permits," added Elisabeth.

The King growled out, "It is your comedy, Madame; I meddle not."

The Austrian priest had no common language with Berenger but Latin. He asked a few questions, and on hearing the answers, declared that the sacrament of marriage had been complete, but that—as was often done in such cases—he would once more hear the troth-plight of the young pair. The brief formula was therefore at once exchanged—the King, when the Queen looked entreatingly at him, rousing himself to make the bride over to Berenger. As soon as the vows had been made, in the briefest manner, the King broke in boisterously: "There, you are twice married, to please Madame there; but hold your tongues all of you about this scene in the play."

Then almost pushing Eustacie over to Berenger, he added, "There she is! take your wife, sir: but mind, she was as much yours before as she is now."

But for all Berenger had said about "his wife," it was only now that he really *felt* her his own, and became husband rather than lover—man instead of boy. She was entirely his own now, and he only desired to be away with her; but some days' delay was necessary. A chase on the scale of the one that was to favour their evasion could not be got up without some notice; and, moreover, it was necessary to procure money, for neither Sidney nor Ribaumont had more than enough with them for the needful liberalities to the King's servants and huntsmen. Indeed Berenger had spent all that remained in his purse upon the wares of an Italian pedlar whom he and Eustacie met in the woods, and whose gloves "as sweet as fragrant posies," fans, scent-boxes, pocket mirrors, Genoa wire, Venice chains, and other toys, afforded him the means of making up the gifts

that he wished to carry home to his sisters; and Eustacie's counsel was merrily given in the choice. And when the vendor began with a meaning smile to recommend to the young pair themselves a little silver-netted heart as a love-token, and it turned out that all Berenger's money was gone, so that it could not be bought without giving up the scented casket destined for Lucy, Eustacie turned with her sweetest proudest smile, and said, "No, no; I will not have it; what do we two want with love-tokens now?"

Sidney had taken the youthful and romantic view of the case, and considered himself to be taking the best possible care of his young friend, by enabling him to deal honourably with so charming a little wife as Eustacie. Ambassador and tutor would doubtless be very angry; but Sidney could judge for himself of the lady, and he therefore threw himself into her interests, and sent his servant back to Paris to procure the necessary sum for the journey of Master Henry Berenger and Mistress Mary, his wife. Sidney was, on his return alone to Paris, to explain all to the elders, and pacify them as best he could; and his servant was already the bearer of a letter from Berenger that was to be sent at once to England with Walsingham's despatches, to prepare Lord Walwyn for the arrival of the runaways. The poor boy laboured to be impressively calm and reasonable in his explanation of the misrepresentation, and of his strong grounds for assuming his rights, with his persuasion that his wife would readily join the English Church—a consideration that he knew would greatly smooth the way for her. Indeed, his own position was impregnable: nobody could blame him for taking his own wife to himself, and he was so sure of her charms, that he troubled himself very little about the impression she might make on his kindred. If they loved her, it was all right; if not, he could take her

back to his own castle, and win fame and honour under the banner of France in the Low Countries. As to Lucy Thistlewood she was far too discreet to feel any disappointment or displeasure; or if she should, it was her own fault and that of his mother, for all her life she had known him to be married. So he finished his letter with a message that the bells should be ready to ring, and that when Philip heard three guns fired on the coast, he might light the big beacon pile above the Combe.

Meantime "the Queen's Pastoral" was much relished by all the spectators. The state of things was only avowed to Charles, Elisabeth, and Philip Sidney, and even the last did not know of the renewed troth which the King chose to treat as such a secret; but no one had any doubt of the mutual relations of M. de Ribaumont and Mdlle. de Nid-de-Merle, and their dream of bliss was like a pastoral for the special diversion of the holiday of Montpipeau. The transparency of their indifference in company, their meeting eyes, their trysts with the secrecy of an ostrich, were the subjects of constant amusement to the elders, more especially as the shyness, blushes, and caution were much more on the side of the young husband than on that of the lady. Fresh from her convent, simple with childishness and innocence, it was to her only the natural completion of her life to be altogether Berenger's, and the brief concealment of their full union added a certain romantic enchantment, which added to her exultation in her victory over her cruel kindred. She had been upon her own mind, poor child, for her few weeks of Court life, but not long enough to make her grow older, though just so long as to make the sense of having her own protector with her doubly precious. He, on the other hand, though full of happiness, did also feel constantly deepening on him the sense of the charge and responsibility he had assumed,

hardly knowing how. The more dear Eustacie became to him, the more she rested on him and became entirely his, the more his boyhood and *insouciance* drifted away behind him; and while he could hardly bear to have his darling a moment out of his sight, the less he could endure any remark or jest upon his affection for her. His home had been a refined one, where Cecily's convent purity seemed to diffuse an atmosphere of modest reserve such as did not prevail in the Court of the Maiden Queen herself, and the lad of eighteen had not seen enough of the outer world to have rubbed off any of that grace. His seniority to his little wife seemed to show itself chiefly in his being put out of countenance for her, when she was too innocent and too proud of her secret matronhood to understand or resent the wit.

Little did he know that this was the ballet-like interlude in a great and terrible tragedy, whose first act was being played out on the stage where they schemed and sported, like their own little drama, which was all the world to them, and nothing to the others. Berenger knew indeed that the Admiral was greatly rejoiced that the Nid-de-Merle estates should go into Protestant hands, and that the old gentleman lost no opportunity of impressing on him that they were a heavy trust, to be used for the benefit of "the Religion," and for the support of the King in his better mind. But it may be feared that he did not give a very attentive ear to all this. He did not like to think of those estates; he would gladly have left them all to Narcisse, so that he might have their lady, and though quite willing to win his spurs under Charles and Coligny against the Spaniard, his heart and head were far too full to take in the web of politics. Sooth to say, the elopement in prospect seemed to him infinitely more important than Pope or Spaniard, Guise or Huguenot, and Coligny observed with a sigh to Teligny that he was a

good boy, but nothing but the merest boy, with eyes open only to himself.

When Charles undertook to rehearse their escape with them, and the Queen drove out in a little high-wheeled litter with Mme. la Comtesse, while Mme. de Sauve and Eustacie were mounted on gay palfreys with the pommelled side-saddle lately invented by the Queen-mother, Berenger, as he watched the fearless horsemanship and graceful bearing of his newly-won wife, had no speculations to spend on the thoughtful face of the Admiral. And when at the outskirts of the wood the King's bewildering hunting-horn—sounding as it were now here, now there, now low, now high—called every attendant to hasten to its summons, leaving the young squire and damsel errant with a long winding high-banked lane before them, they reckoned the dispersion to be all for their sakes, and did not note, as did Sidney's clear eye, that when the entire company had come straggling home, it was the King who came up with Mme. de Sauve almost the last; and a short space after, as if not to appear to have been with him, appeared the Admiral and his son-in-law.

Sidney also missed one of the Admiral's most trusted attendants, and from this and other symptoms he formed his conclusions that the King had scattered his followers as much for the sake of an unobserved conference with Coligny as for the convenience of the lovers, and that letters had been despatched in consequence of that meeting.

Those letters were indeed of a kind to change the face of affairs in France. Marshal Strozzi, then commanding in the south-west, was bidden to embark at La Rochelle in the last week of August, to hasten to the succour of the Prince of Orange against Spain, and letters were despatched by Coligny to all the Huguenot partisans bidding them assemble at Melun on the 3d of September, when they

would be in the immediate neighbourhood of the Court, which was bound for Fontainebleau. Was the star of the Guises indeed waning? Was Charles about to escape from their hands, and commit himself to an honest, high-minded policy, in which he might have been able to purify his national Church, and win back to her those whom her corruptions had driven to seek truth and morality beyond her pale?

Alas! there was a bright pair of eyes that saw more than Philip Sidney's, a pair of ears that heard more, a tongue and pen less faithful to guard a secret.

CHAPTER VIII.

"LE BROUILLON."

"But never more the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other."

TENNYSON.

BERENGER was obliged to crave permission from the King to spend some hours in riding with Osbert to the first hostel on their way, to make arrangements for the relay of horses that was to meet them there, and for the reception of Véronique, Eustacie's maid, who was to be sent off very early in the morning on a pillion behind Osbert, taking with her the articles of dress that would be wanted to change her mistress from the huntress maid of honour to the English dame.

It was not long after he had been gone that a sound of wheels and trampling horses was heard in one of the forest drives. Charles, who was amusing himself with shooting at a mark together with Sidney and Teligny, handed his weapon to an attendant, and came up with looks of restless anxiety to his Queen, who was placed in her chair under the tree, with the Admiral and her ladies round her, as judges of the prize.

"Here is *le brouillon*," he muttered. "I thought we had been left in peace too long."

Elisabeth, who Brantôme says was water, while her husband was fire, tried to murmur some hopeful suggestion; and poor

little Eustacie, clasping her hands, could scarcely refrain from uttering the cry, "Oh, it is my uncle! Do not let him take me!"

The next minute there appeared four horses greatly heated and jaded, drawing one of the Court coaches; and as it stopped at the castle gate, two ladies became visible within it—the portly form of Queen Catherine, and on the back seat the graceful figure of Diane de Ribaumont.

Charles swore a great oath under his breath. He made a step forward, but then his glance falling on Eustacie's face, which had flushed to the rosiest hue of the carnation, he put his finger upon his lip with a menacing air, and then advanced to greet his mother, followed by his gentlemen.

"Fear not, my dear child," said the young Queen, taking Eustacie's arm as she rose for the same purpose. "Obey the King, and he will take care that all goes well."

The gentle Elisabeth was, however, the least regarded member of the royal family. Her mother-in-law had not even waited to greet her, but had hurried the King into his cabinet, with precipitation that made the young Queen's tender heart conclude that some dreadful disaster had occurred, and before Mademoiselle de Ribaumont had had time to make her reverence, she exclaimed, breathlessly, "Oh, is it ill news? Not from Vienna?"

"No, no, Madame; reassure yourself," replied Diane; "it is merely that her Majesty being on the way to Monceaux with Mesdames turned out of her road to make a flying visit to your graces, and endeavour to persuade you to make her party complete."

Elisabeth looked as if questioning with herself if this would possibly be the whole explanation. Monceaux was a castle belonging to the Queen Dowager at no great distance from Montpipeau, but there had been no intention of leaving

Paris before the wedding, which was fixed for the seventeenth of August, and the bridegroom was daily expected. She asked who was the party at Monceaux, and was told that Madame de Nemours had gone thither the evening before, with her son, M. de Guise, to make ready; and that Monsieur was escorting thither his two sisters, Madame de Lorraine and Madame Marguerite. The Queen-mother had set out before them very early in the morning.

"You must have made great speed," said Elisabeth; "it is scarcely two o'clock."

"Truly we did, Madame; two of our horses even died upon the road, but the Queen was anxious to find the King ere he should set off on one of his long chases."

Diane, at every spare moment, kept her eyes interrogatively fixed on her cousin, and evidently expected that the taciturn Queen, to whom a long conversation, in any language but Spanish, was always a grievance, would soon dismiss them both; and Eustacie did not know whether to be thankful or impatient, as Elisabeth, with tardy, hesitating, mentally-translated speech, inquired into every circumstance of the death of the poor horses, and then into all the Court gossip, which she was currently supposed neither to hear nor understand; and then bethought herself that this good Mademoiselle de Ribaumont could teach her that embroidery stitch she had so long wished to learn. Taking her arm, she entered the hall, and produced her work, so as effectually to prevent any communication between the cousins; Eustacie, meanwhile her heart clinging to her friend, felt her eyes filling with tears at the thoughts of how unkind her morrow's flight would seem without one word of farewell or of confidence, and was already devising tokens of tenderness to be left behind for Diane's consolation, when the door of the cabinet opened, and Catherine sailed down the stairs, with

her peculiar gliding step and sweep of dignity. The King followed her with a face of irresolution and distress. He was evidently under her displeasure, but she advanced to the young Queen with much graciousness, and an air of matronly solicitude.

"My daughter," she said, "I have just assured the King that I cannot leave you in these damp forests. I could not be responsible for the results of the exposure any longer. It is for him to make his own arrangements, but I brought my coach empty on purpose to transport you and your ladies to Monceaux. The women may follow with the mails. You can be ready as soon as the horses are harnessed."

Elisabeth was used to passiveness. She turned one inquiring look to her husband, but he looked sullen, and, evidently cowed by his mother, uttered not a word. She could only submit, and Catherine herself added that there was room for Madame de Sauve and Mademoiselle de Nid-de-Merle. Madame la Comtesse should follow! It was self-evident that propriety would not admit of the only demoiselle being left behind among the gentlemen. Poor Eustacie, she looked mutely round as if she hoped to escape! What was the other unkindness to this? And ever under the eyes of Diane too, who followed her to their chamber, when she went to prepare, so that she could not even leave a token for him where he would have been most certain to find it. Moments were few; but at the very last, while the queens were being handed in the carriage, she caught the eye of Philip Sidney. He saw the appealing look, and came near. She tried to laugh. "Here is my gage, Monsieur Sidney," she said, and held out a rose-coloured knot of ribbon; then, as he came near enough, she whispered imploringly three of her few English words—

"Give to *him*."

"I take the gage as it is meant," said Sidney, putting a knee to the ground, and kissing the trembling fingers, ere he handed her into the carriage. He smiled and waved his hand as he met her earnest eyes. One bow contained a scrap of paper pricked with needle-holes. Sidney would not have made out those pricks for the whole world, even had he been able to do more than hastily secure the token, before the unhappy King, with a paroxysm of violent interjections, demanded of him whether the Queen of England, woman though she were, ever were so beset, and never allowed a moment to herself; then, without giving time for an answer, he flung away to his cabinet, and might be heard pacing up and down there in a tempest of perplexity. He came forth only to order his horse, and desire M. de Sauve and a few grooms to be ready instantly to ride with him. His face was full of pitiable perplexity—the smallest obstacle was met with a savage oath; and he was evidently in all the misery of a weak yet passionate nature, struggling with impotent violence against a yoke that evidently mastered it.

He flung a word to his guests that he should return ere night, and they thus perceived that he did not intend their dismissal.

"Poor youth," said Coligny, mildly, "he will be another being when we have him in our camp with the King of Navarre for his companion."

And then the Admiral repaired to his chamber to write one of his many fond letters to the young wife of his old age; while his son-in-law and Philip Sidney agreed to ride on, so as to meet poor young Ribaumont, and prepare him for the blow that had befallen him personally, while they anxiously debated what this sudden descent of the Queen-mother might portend. Teligny was ready to believe in any evil intention on her part, but he thought himself certain of the

King's real sentiments, and in truth Charles had never treated any man with such confidence as this young Huguenot noble, to whom he had told his opinion of each of his counsellors, and his complete distrust of all. That pitying affection which clings to those who cling to it, as well as a true French loyalty of heart, made Teligny fully believe that however Catherine might struggle to regain her ascendency, and whatever apparent relapses might be caused by Charles's habitual subjection to her, yet the high aspirations and strong sense of justice inherent in the King were asserting themselves as his youth was passing into manhood; and that the much desired war would enable him to develop all his higher qualities. Sidney listened, partially agreed, talked of caution, and mused within himself whether violence might not sometimes be mistaken for vigour.

Ere long, the merry cadence of an old English song fell with a homelike sound upon Sidney's ear, and in another moment they were in sight of Berenger, trotting joyously along, with a bouquet of crimson and white heather blossoms in his hand, and his bright young face full of exultation in his arrangements. He shouted gaily as he saw them, calling out, "I thought I should meet you! but I wondered not to have heard the King's bugle-horn. Where are the rest of the hunters?"

"Unfortunately we have had another sort of hunt to-day," said Sidney, who had ridden forward to meet him; "and one that, I fear, will disquiet you greatly."

"How! Not her uncle?" exclaimed Berenger.

"No, cheer up, my friend, it was not she who was the object of the chase; it was this unlucky King," he added, speaking English, "who has been run to earth by his mother."

"Nay, but what is that to me?" said Berenger, with

impatient superiority to the affairs of the nation. "How does it touch us?"

Sidney related the abstraction of the young Queen and her ladies, and then handed over the rose-coloured token, which Berenger took with vehement ardour, then his features quivered as he read the needle-pricked words—two that he had playfully insisted on her speaking and spelling after him in his adopted tongue, then not vulgarized, but the tenderest in the language, "Sweet heart." That was all, but to him they conveyed constancy to him and his, whatever might betide, and an entreaty not to leave her to her fate.

"My dearest! never!" he muttered; then turning hastily as he put the precious token into his bosom, he exclaimed, "Are their women yet gone?" and being assured that they were not departed when the two friends had set out, he pushed his horse on at speed, so as to be able to send a reply by Véronique. He was barely in time: the clumsy wagon-like conveyance of the waiting-women stood at the door of the castle, in course of being packed with the Queen's wardrobe, amid the janglings of lackeys, and expostulating cries of *femmes de chambre*, all in the worst possible humour at being crowded up with their natural enemies, the household of the Queen-mother.

Véronique, a round-faced Angevin girl—who, like her lady, had not parted with all her rustic simplicity and honesty, and who had been necessarily taken into their confidence—was standing apart from the whirl of confusion, holding the leashes of two or three little dogs that had been confided to her care, that their keepers might with more ease throw themselves into the *mêlée*. Her face lighted up as she saw the Baron de Ribaumont arrive.

"Ah, sir, Madame will be so happy that I have seen

Monsieur once more," she exclaimed under her breath, as he approached her.

"Alas! there is not a moment to write," he said, looking at the vehicle, already fast filling, "but give her these flowers; they were gathered for her; give her ten thousand thanks for her token. Tell her to hold firm, and that neither king nor queen, bolt nor bar, shall keep me from her. Tell her, our watchword is *hope*."

The sharp eyes of the duenna of the Queen's household, a rigid Spanish dame, were already searching for stray members of her flock, and Véronique had to hurry to her place, while Berenger remained to hatch new plans, each wilder than the last, and torment himself with guesses whether his project had been discovered. Indeed, there were moments when he fancied the frustration of his purpose the special object of Queen Catherine's journey, but he had the wisdom to keep any such suggestion to himself.

The King came back by supper-time, looking no longer in a state of indecision, but pale and morose. He spoke to no one as he entered, and afterwards took his place at the head of the supper-table in silence, which he did not break till the meal was nearly over. Then he said abruptly, "Gentlemen, our party has been broken up, and I imagine that after our great hunt to-morrow, no one will have any objection to return to Paris. We shall have merrier sport at Fontainebleau when this most troublesome of weddings is over."

There was nothing to be done but to bow acquiescence, and the King again became grimly silent. After supper he challenged Coligny to a game of chess, and not a word passed during the protracted contest, either from the combatants or any other person in the hall. It was as if the light had suddenly gone out to others besides the disappointed and

anxious Berenger, and a dull shadow had fallen on the place only yesterday so lively, joyous, and hopeful.

Berenger, chained by the etiquette of the royal presence, sat like a statue, his back against the wall, his arms crossed on his breast, his eyes fixed, chewing the cud of the memories of his dream of bliss, or striving to frame the future to his will, and to decide what was the next reasonable step he could take, or whether his irrepressible longing to ride straight off to Monceaux, claim his wife, and take her on horseback behind him, were a mere impracticable vision.

The King, having been checkmated twice out of three times by the Admiral, too honest a man not truly to accept his declaration of not wanting courtly play, pushed away the board, and was attended by them all to his *coucher*, which was usually made in public; and the Queen being absent, the gentlemen were required to stand around him till he was ready to fall asleep. He did not seem disposed to talk, but begged Sidney to fetch his lute, and sing to him some English airs that had taken his fancy much when sung by Sidney and Berenger together.

Berenger felt as if they would choke him in his present turbid state of resentful uncertainty; but even as the unhappy young King spoke, it was with a heavy, restless groan, as he added, "If you know any lullaby that will give rest to a wretch, tormented beyond bearing, let us have it."

"Alas, Sire!" said the Admiral, seeing that no perilous ears remained in the room; "there are better and more soothing words than any mundane melody."

"*Peste!* My good father," said the King petulantly, "has not old Phlipote, my nurse, rocked me to the sound of your Marot's Psalms, and crooned her texts over me. I tell you I do not want to think. I want what will drive thought away—to dull——"

"Alas! what dulls slays," said the Admiral.

"Let it. Nothing can be worse than the present," said the wretched Charles; then, as if wishing to break away from Coligny, he threw himself round towards Berenger, and said, "Here; stoop down, Ribaumont; a word with you. Your matters have gone up the mountains, as the Italians say, with mine. But never fear. Keep silence, and you shall have the bird in your hand, only you must be patient. Hold! I will make you and Monsieur Sidney gentlemen of my bed-chamber, which will give you the *entrée* of the Louvre; and if you cannot get her out of it without an *éclat*, then you must be a much duller fellow than half my Court. Only that it is not their own wives that they abstract."

With this Berenger must needs content himself; and the certainty of the poor King's good will did enable him to do his part with Sidney in the songs that endeavoured to soothe the torments of the evil spirit which had on that day effected a fresh lodgment in that weak, unwilling heart.

It was not till the memoirs of the secret actors in this tragedy were brought to light that the key to these doings was discovered. M. de Sauve, Charles's secretary, had disclosed his proceedings to his wife; she, flattered by the attentions of the Duke of Anjou, betrayed them to him; and the Queen-mother, terrified at the change of policy, and the loss of the power she had enjoyed for so many years, had hurried to the spot.

Her influence over her son resembled the fascination of a snake: once within her reach he was unable to resist her; and when in their *tête-à-tête* she reproached him with ill-faith towards her, prophesied the overthrow of the Church, the desertion of his allies, the ruin of his throne, and finally announced her intention of hiding her head in her own hereditary estates in Auvergne, begging, as a last favour, that

he would give his brother time to quit France instead of involving him in his own ruin, the poor young man's whole soul was in commotion. His mother knew her strength, left the poison to work, and withdrew in displeasure to Monceaux, sure that, as in effect happened, he would not be long in following her, imploring her not to abandon him, and making an unconditional surrender of himself, his conscience, and his friends into her hands. Duplicity was so entirely the element of the Court, that, even while thus yielding himself, it was as one checked, but continuing the game; he still continued his connexion with the Huguenots, hoping to succeed in his aims by some future counter-intrigue; and his real hatred of the Court policy, and the genuine desire to make common cause with them, served his mother's purpose completely, since his cajolery thus became sincere. Her purpose was, probably, not yet formed. It was power that she loved, and hoped to secure by the intrigues she had played off all her life; but she herself was in the hands of an infinitely more bloodthirsty and zealous faction, who could easily accomplish their ends by working on the womanly terrors of an unscrupulous mind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEDDING WITH CRIMSON FAVOURS.

"And trust me not at all or all in all."

TENNYSON.

So extensive was the Louvre, so widely separated the different suites of apartments, that Diane and Eustacie had not met after the pall-mall party till they sat opposite to their several queens in the coach driving through the woods, the elder cousin curiously watching the eyes of the younger, so wistfully gazing at the window, and now and then rapidly winking as though to force back a rebellious tear.

The cousins had been bred up together in the convent at Bellaise, and had only been separated by Diane's having been brought to Court two years sooner than Eustacie. They had always been on very kindly, affectionate terms: Diane treating her little cousin with the patronage of an elder sister, and greatly contributing to shield her from the temptations of the Court. The elder cousin was so much the more handsome, brilliant, and admired, that no notion of rivalry had crossed her mind; and Eustacie's inheritance was regarded by her as reserved for her brother, and the means of aggrandizement and prosperity for herself and her father. She looked upon the child as a sort of piece of property of the family, to be guarded and watched over for her brother; and when she had first discovered the

error that the young baron was making between the two daughters of the house, it was partly in kindness to Eustacie, partly to carry out her father's plans, and partly from her own pleasure in conversing with anything so candid and fresh as Berenger, that she had maintained the delusion. Her father believed himself to have placed Berenger so entirely in the background, that he would hardly be at Court long enough to discover the imposition; and Diane was not devoid of a strong hope of winning his affection and bending his will so as to induce him to become her husband, and become a French courtier for her sake—a wild dream, but a better castle in the air than she had ever yet indulged in.

This arrangement was, however, disconcerted by the King's passion for Sidney's society, which brought young Ribaumont also to Court; and at the time of the mischievous introduction by Madame Marguerite, Diane had perceived that the mistake would soon be found out, and that she should no longer be able to amuse herself with the fresh-coloured, open-faced boy who was so unlike all her former acquaintance; but the magnetism that shows a woman when she produces an effect had been experienced by her, and she had been sure that a few efforts more would warm and mould the wax in her fingers. That he should prefer a little brown thing, whose beauty was so inferior to her own, had never crossed her mind; she did not even know that he was invited to the pall-mall party, and was greatly taken by surprise when her father sought an interview with her, accused her of betraying their interests, and told her that this foolish young fellow declared that he had been mistaken, and having now discovered his veritable wife, protested against resigning her.

By that time the whole party were gone to Montpipeau,

but that the Baron was among them was not known at the Louvre until Queen Catherine, who had always treated Diane as rather a favoured, quick-witted *protégée*, commanded her attendance, and on her way let her know that Madame de Sauve had reported that, among all the follies that were being perpetrated at the hunting-seat, the young Queen was absolutely throwing the little Nid-de-Merle into the arms of her Huguenot husband, and that if measures were not promptly taken all the great estates in the Bocage would be lost to the young Chevalier, and be carried over to the Huguenot interest.

Still Diane could not believe that it was so much a matter of love as that the youth had begun to relish Court favour and to value the inheritance, and she could quite believe her little cousin had been flattered by a few attentions that had no meaning in them. She was not prepared to find that Eustacie shrank from her, and tried to avoid a private interview. In truth, the poor child had received such injunctions from the Queen, and so stern a warning look from the King, that she durst not utter a syllable of the evening that had sealed her lot, and was so happy with her secret, so used to tell everything to Diane, so longing to talk of her husband, that she was afraid of betraying herself if once they were alone together. Yet Diane, knowing that her father trusted to her to learn how far things had gone, and piqued at seeing the transparent little creature, now glowing and smiling with inward bliss, now pale, pensive, sighing, and anxious, and scorning her as too childish for the love that she seemed to affect, was resolved on obtaining confidence from her.

And when the whole female Court had sat down to the silk embroidery in which Catherine de Medicis excelled, Diane seated herself in the recess of a window and beckoned

her cousin to her side, so that it was not possible to disobey.

"Little one," she said, "why have you cast off your poor cousin? There, sit down"—for Eustacie stood, with her silk in her hand, as if meaning instantly to return to her former place; and now, her cheeks in a flame, she answered in an indignant whisper, "You know, Diane! How could you try to keep him from me?"

"Because it was better for thee, my child, than to be pestered with an adventurer," she said, smiling, though bitterly.

"My husband!" returned Eustacie proudly.

"Bah! You know better than that!" Then, as Eustacie was about to speak, but checked herself, Diane added, "Yes, my poor friend, he has a something engaging about him, and we all would have hindered you from the pain and embarassment of a meeting with him."

Eustacie smiled a little saucy smile, as though infinitely superior to them all.

"*Pauvre petite,*" said Diane, nettled; "she actually believes in his love."

"I will not hear a word against my husband!" said Eustacie, stepping back, as if to return to her place, but Diane rose and laid her hand on hers. "My dear," she said, "we must not part thus. I only wish to know what touches my darling so nearly. I thought she loved and clung to us; why should she have turned from me for the sake of one who forgot her for half his life? What can he have done to master this silly little heart?"

"I cannot tell you, Diane," said Eustacie simply; and though she looked down, the colour on her face was more of a happy glow than a conscious blush. "I love him too much; only we understand each other now, and it is of no use to try to separate us."

"Ah, poor little thing, so she thinks," said Diane, and as Eustacie again smiled as one incapable of being shaken in her conviction, she added, "And how do you know that he loves you?"

Diane was startled by the bright eyes that flashed on her and the bright colour that made Eustacie perfectly beautiful, as she answered, "Because I am his wife! That is enough!" Then, before her cousin could speak again, "But, Diane, I promised not to speak of it. I know he would despise me if I broke my word, so I will not talk to you till I have leave to tell you all, and I am going back to help Gabrielle de Limeuil with her shepherdess."

Mademoiselle de Ribaumont felt her attempt most unsatisfactory, but she knew of old that Eustacie was very determined—all Bellaise knew that to oppose the tiny Baronne was to make her headstrong in her resolution; and if she suspected that she was coaxed, she only became more obstinate. To make any discoveries, Diane must take the line of most cautious caresses, such as to throw her cousin off her guard; and this she was forced to confess to her father when he sought an interview with her on the day of her return to Paris. He shook his head. "She must be on the watch," he said, and get quickly into the silly girl's confidence. What! had she not found out that the young villain had been on the point of eloping with her? If such a thing as that should succeed, the whole family was lost, and she was the only person who could prevent it. He trusted to her.

The Chevalier had evidently come to regard his niece as his son's lawful property, and the Baron as the troublesome meddler; and Diane had much the same feeling, enhanced by sore jealousy at Eustacie's triumph over her, and curiosity as to whether it could be indeed well founded. She had an

opportunity of judging the same evening—mere habit always caused Eustacie to keep under her wing, if she could not be near the Queen, whenever there was a reception, and to that reception of course Berenger came, armed with his right as gentleman of the bedchamber. Eustacie was colouring and fluttering, as if by the instinct of his presence, even before the tall fair head became visible, moving forward as well as the crowd would permit, and seeking about with anxious eyes. The glances of the blue and the black eyes met at last, and a satisfied radiance illuminated each young face; then the young man steered his way through the throng, but was caught midway by Coligny, and led up to be presented to a hook-nosed, dark-haired, lively-looking young man, in a suit of black richly laced with silver. It was the King of Navarre, the royal bridegroom, who had entered Paris in state that afternoon. Eustacie tried to be proud of the preferment, but oh! she thought it mistimed, and was gratified to mark certain wanderings of the eye even while the gracious King was speaking. Then the Admiral said something that brought the girlish rosy flush up to the very roots of the short curls of flaxen hair, and made the young King's white teeth flash out in a mirthful, good-natured laugh, and thereupon the way opened, and Berenger was beside the two ladies, kissing Eustacie's hand, but merely bowing to Diane.

She was ready to take the initiative.

"My cousins deem me unpardonable," she said; "yet I am going to purchase their pardon. See this cabinet of porcelain *à la Reine*, and Italian vases and gems, behind this curtain. There is all the siege of Troy, which M. le Baron will no doubt explain to Mademoiselle, while I shall sit on this cushion, and endure the siege of St. Quentin from the *bon* Sieur de Selinville."

Monsieur de Selinville was the Court bore, who had been in every battle from Pavia to Montcontour, and gave as full memoirs of each as did Blaise de Monluc, only *vivâ voce* instead of in writing. Diane was rather a favourite of his; she knew her way through all his adventures. So soon as she had heard the description of the King of Navarre's entry into Paris that afternoon, and the old gentleman's lamentation that his own two nephews were among the three hundred Huguenot gentlemen who had formed the escort, she had only to observe whether his reminiscences had gone to Italy or to Flanders in order to be able to put in the appropriate remarks at each pause, while she listened all the while to the murmurs behind the curtain. Yet it was not easy, with all her Court-breeding, to appear indifferent, and solely absorbed in hearing of the bad lodgings that had fallen to the share of the royal troops at Brescia, when such sounds were reaching her. It was not so much the actual words she heard, though these were the phrases—"*mon ange*, my heart, my love;" those were common, and Diane had lived in the Queen-mother's squadron long enough to despise those who uttered them only less than those who believed them. It was the full depth of tenderness and earnestness, in the subdued tones of the voice, that gave her a sense of quiet force and reality beyond all she had ever known. She had heard and overheard men pour out frantic ravings of passion, but never had listened to anything like the sweet protecting tenderness of voice that seemed to embrace and shelter its object. Diane had no doubts now; he had never so spoken to her; nay, perhaps he had had no such cadences in his voice before. It was quite certain that Eustacie was everything to him, she herself nothing; she who might have had any gallant in the Court at her feet, but had never seen one whom she could believe in, whose sense of esteem

had been first awakened by this stranger lad who despised her. Surely he was loving this foolish child simply as his duty; his belonging, as his right he might struggle hard for her, and if he gained her, be greatly disappointed; for how could Eustacie appreciate him, little empty-headed, silly thing, who would be amused and satisfied by any Court flatterer?

However, Diane held out and played her part, caught scraps of the conversation, and pieced them together, yet avoided all appearance of inattention to M. de Selinville, and finally dismissed him, and manœuvred first Eustacie, and after a safe interval Berenger, out of the cabinet. The latter bowed as he bade her good night, and said, with the most open and cordial of smiles, "Cousin, I thank you with all my heart."

The bright look seemed to her another shaft. "What happiness!" said she to herself. "Can I overthrow it? Bah! it will crumble of its own accord, even if I did nothing! And my father and brother!"

Communication with her father and brother was not always easy to Diane, for she lived among the Queen-mother's ladies. Her brother was quartered in a sort of barrack among the gentlemen of Monsieur's suite, and the old Chevalier was living in the room Berenger had taken for him at the Croix de Lorraine, and it was only on the most public days that they attended at the palace. Such a day, however, there was on the ensuing Sunday, when Henry of Navarre and Marguerite of France were to be wedded. Their dispensation was come, but, to the great relief of Eustacie, there was no answer with it to the application for the *cassation* of her marriage. In fact, this dispensation had never emanated from the Pope at all. Rome would not sanction the union of a daughter of France with a Huguenot prince; and Charles had forged the

document, probably with his mother's knowledge, in the hope of spreading her toils more completely round her prey, while he trusted that the victims might prove too strong for her, and destroy her web, and in breaking forth might release himself.

Strange was the pageant of that wedding on Sunday, the 17th of August, 1572. The outward seeming was magnificent, when all that was princely in France stood on the splendidly-decked platform in front of Notre-Dame, around the bridegroom in the bright promise of his kingly endowments, and the bride in her peerless beauty. Brave, noble-hearted, and devoted were the gallant following of the one, splendid and highly gifted the attendants of the other; and their union seemed to promise peace to a long distracted kingdom.

Yet what an abyss lay beneath those trappings! The bridegroom and his comrades were as lions in the toils of the hunter, and the lure that had enticed them thither was the bride, herself so unwilling a victim that her lips refused to utter the espousal vows, and her head was forced forward by her brother into a sign of consent; while the favoured lover of her whole lifetime agreed to the sacrifice in order to purchase the vengeance for which he thirsted, and her mother, the corrupter of her own children, looked complacently on at her ready-dug pit of treachery and bloodshed.

Among the many who played unconscious on the surface of that gulf of destruction, were the young creatures whose chief thought in the pageant was the glance and smile from the gallery of the Queen's ladies to the long procession of the English Ambassador's train, as they tried to remember their own marriage there; Berenger with clear recollection of his father's grave, anxious face, and Eustacie chiefly remembering her own white satin and turquoise dress, which indeed she had seen on every great festival-day as the best raiment

of the image of Notre-Dame de Bellaise. She remained in the choir during mass, but Berenger accompanied the rest of the Protestants with the bridegroom at their head into the nave, where Coligny beguiled the time with walking about, looking at the banners that had been taken from himself and Condé at Montcontour and Jarnac, saying that he hoped soon to see them taken down and replaced by Spanish banners. Berenger had followed, because he felt the need of doing as Walsingham and Sidney thought right, but he had not been in London long enough to become hardened to the desecration of churches by frequenting "Paul's Walk." He remained bareheaded, and stood as near as he could to the choir, listening to the notes that floated from the priests and acolytes at the high altar, longing for the time when he and Eustacie should be one in their prayers, and lost in a reverie, till a grave old nobleman passing near him reproved him for dallying with the worship of Rimmon. But his listening attitude had not passed unobserved by others besides Huguenot observers.

The wedding was followed by a ball at the Louvre, from which, however, all the stricter Huguenots absented themselves out of respect to Sunday, and among them the family and guests of the English Ambassador, who were in the meantime attending the divine service that had been postponed on account of the morning's ceremony. Neither was the Duke of Guise present at the entertainment; for though he had some months previously been piqued and entrapped into a marriage with Catherine of Cleves, yet his passion for Marguerite was still so strong that he could not bear to join in the festivities of her wedding with another. The absence of so many distinguished persons caused the admission of many less constantly privileged, and thus it was that Diane there met both her father and brother, who eagerly drew her

into a window, and demanded what she had to tell them, laughing too at the simplicity of the youth, who had left for the Chevalier a formal announcement that he had despatched his protest to Rome, and considered himself as free to obtain his wife by any means in his power.

"Where is *la petite?*" Narcisse demanded. "Behind her Queen, as usual?"

"The young Queen keeps her room to-night," returned Diane. "Nor do I advise you, brother, to thrust yourself in the way of *la petite entêtée* just at present."

"What, is she so besotted with the peach face? He shall pay for it!"

"Brother, no duel. Father, remind him that she would never forgive him."

"Fear not, daughter," said the Chevalier; "this folly can be ended by much quieter modes, only you must first give us information."

"She tells me nothing," said Diane; "she is in one of her own humours—high and mighty."

"*Peste!* where is your vaunt of winding the little one round your finger?"

"With time, I said," replied Diane. Curiously enough, she had no compunction in worming secrets from Eustacie and betraying them, but she could not bear to think of the trap she had set for the unsuspecting youth, and how ingenuously he had thanked her, little knowing how she had listened to his inmost secrets.

"Time is everything," said her father; "delay will be our ruin. Your inheritance will slip through your fingers, my son. The youth will soon win favour by abjuring his heresy; he will play the same game with the King as his father did with King Henri. You will have nothing but your sword, and for you, my poor girl, there is nothing but to throw

yourself on the kindness of your aunt at Bellaise, if she can receive the vows of a dowerless maiden."

"It will never be," said Narcisse. "My rapier will soon dispose of a big rustic like that, who knows just enough of fencing to make him an easy prey. What! I verily believe the great blond has caught her fancy!" as he saw Diane's gesture of entreaty. "And yet the fine fellow was willing enough to break the marriage when he took her for the bride."

"Nay, my son," argued the Chevalier, willing apparently to spare his daughter from the sting of mortification, "as I said, all can be done without danger of bloodshed on either side, were we but aware of any renewed project of elopement. The pretty pair would be easily waylaid, the girl safely lodged at Bellaise, the boy sent off to digest his pride in England."

"Unhurt?" murmured Diane.

Her father checked Narcisse's mockery at her solicitude, as he added, "Unhurt? yes. He is a liberal-hearted, gracious, fine young man, whom I should much grieve to harm; but if you know of any plan of elopement and conceal it, my daughter, then upon you will lie either the ruin and disgrace of your family, or the death of one or both of the youths."

Diane saw that her question had betrayed her knowledge. She spoke faintly. "Something I did overhear, but I know not how to utter a treason."

"There is no treason where there is no trust, daughter," said the Chevalier, in the tone of a moral sage. "Speak!"

Diane never disobeyed her father, and faltered, "Wednesday; it is for Wednesday. They mean to leave the palace in the midst of the masque; there is a market-boat from Leurre to meet them on the river; his servants will be in it."

"On Wednesday!" Father and son looked at each other.

"That shall be remedied," said Narcisse.

"Child," added her father, turning kindly to Diane, "you have saved our fortunes. There is but one thing more that you must do. Make her obtain the pearls from him."

"Ah!" sighed Diane, half shocked, half revengeful, as she thought how he had withheld them from her.

"It is necessary," said the Chevalier. "The heirloom of our house must not be risked. Secure the pearls, child, and you will have done good service, and earned the marriage that shall reward you."

When he was gone, Diane pressed her hands together with a strange sense of misery. He, who had shrunk from the memory of little Diane's untruthfulness, what would he think of the present Diane's treachery? Yet it was to sav his life and that of her brother—and for the assertion of her victory over the little robber, Eustacie.

CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR'S BALLET.

"The Styx had fast bound her
Nine times around her."
POPE, *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day.*

EARLY on Monday morning came a message to Mademoiselle Nid-de-Merle that she was to prepare to act the part of a nymph of Paradise in the King's masque on Wednesday night, and must dress at once to rehearse her part in the ballet specially designed by Monsieur.

Her first impulse was to hurry to her own Queen, whom she entreated to find some mode of exempting her. But Elisabeth, who was still in bed, looked distressed and frightened, made signs of caution, and when the weeping girl was on the point of telling her of the project that would thus be ruined, silenced her by saying, "Hush! my poor child, I have but meddled too much already. Our Lady grant that I have not done you more harm than good! Tell me no more."

"Ah! Madame, I will be discreet, I will tell you nothing; but if you would only interfere to spare me from this ballet! It is Monsieur's contrivance! Ah! Madame, could you but speak to the King!"

"Impossible, child," said the Queen. "Things are not here as they were at happy Montpipeau."

And the poor young Queen turned her face in to her pillow, and wept.

Every one who was not in a dream of bliss like poor little Eustacie knew that the King had been in so savage a mood ever since his return that no one durst ask anything from him. A little while since, he had laughed at his gentle wife for letting herself, an Emperor's daughter, be trampled on where his brother Francis's queen, from her trumpery, beggarly realm, had held up her head, and put down *la belle Mère;* he had amused himself with Elisabeth's pretty little patronage of the young Ribaumonts as a promising commencement in intriguing like other people; but now he was absolutely violent at any endeavour to make him withstand his mother, and had driven his wife back into that cold, listless, indifferent shell of apathy from which affection and hope had begun to rouse her. She knew it would only make it the worse for her little Nid-de-Merle for her to interpose when Monsieur had made the choice.

And Eustacie was more afraid of Monsieur than even of Narcisse, and her Berenger could not be there to protect her. However, there was protection in numbers. With twelve nymphs, and cavaliers to match, even the Duke of Anjou could not accomplish the being very insulting. Eustacie—light, agile, and fairy-like—gained considerable credit for ready comprehension and graceful evolutions. She had never been so much complimented before, and was much cheered by praise. Diane showed herself highly pleased with her little cousin's success, embraced her, and told her she was finding her true level at Court. She would be the prettiest of all the nymphs, who were all small, since fairies rather than Amazons were wanted in their position. "And, Eustacie," she added, "you should wear the pearls."

"The pearls!" said Eustacie. "Ah! but *he* always wears them. I like to see them on his bonnet—they are hardly whiter than his forehead."

"Foolish little thing!" said Diane, "I shall think little of his love if he cares to see himself in them more than you."

The shaft seemed carelessly shot, but Diane knew that it would work, and so it did. Eustacie wanted to prove her husband's love, not to herself, but to her cousin.

He made his way to her in the gardens of the Louvre that evening, greatly dismayed at the report that had reached him that she was to figure as a nymph of Elysium. She would thus be in sight as a prominent figure the whole evening, even till an hour so late that the market boat which Osbert had arranged for their escape could not wait for them without exciting suspicion, and besides his delicate English feelings were revolted at the notion of her forming a part of such a spectacle. She could not understand his displeasure. If they could not go on Wednesday, they could go on Saturday; and as to her acting, half the noblest ladies in the Court would be in the piece, and if English husbands did not like it, they must be the tyrants she had always heard of.

"To be a gazing-stock——" began Berenger.

"Hush! monsieur, I will hear no more, or I shall take care how I put myself in your power."

"That has been done for you, sweetheart," he said, smiling with perhaps a shade too much superiority; "you are mine entirely now."

"That is not kind," she pouted, almost crying—for between flattery, excitement, and disappointment she was not like herself that day, and she was too proud to like to be reminded that she was in any one's power.

"I thought," said Berenger, with the gentleness that always made him manly in dealing with her, "I thought you liked to own yourself mine."

"Yes, sir, when you are good, and do not try to hector me for what I cannot avoid."

Berenger was candid enough to recollect that royal commands did not brook disobedience, and, being thoroughly enamoured besides of his little wife, he hastened to make his peace by saying, "True, *ma mie*, this cannot be helped. I was a wretch to find fault. Think of it no more."

"You forgive me?" she said, softened instantly.

"Forgive you? What for, pretty one? For my forgetting that you are still a slave to a hateful court?"

"Ah! then, if you forgive me, let me wear the pearls."

"The poor pearls," said Berenger, taken aback for a moment, "the meed of our forefather's valour, to form part of the pageant and mummery? But never mind, sweetheart," for he could not bear to vex her again; "you shall have them to-night: only take care of them. My mother would look black on me if she knew I had let them out of my care, but you and I are one after all."

Berenger could not bear to leave his wife near the Duke of Anjou and Narcisse, and he offered himself to the King as an actor in the masque, much as he detested all he heard of its subject. The King nodded comprehension, and told him it was open to him either to be a demon in a tight suit of black cloth, with cloven-hoof shoes, a long tail, and a trident; or one of the Huguenots who were to be repulsed from Paradise for the edification of the spectators. As these last were to wear suits of knightly armour, Berenger much preferred making one of them in spite of their doom.

The masque was given at the hall of the Hôtel de Bourbon, where a noble gallery accommodated the audience, and left full space beneath for the actors. Down the centre of the stage flowed a stream, broad enough to contain a boat, which was plied by the Abbé de Méricour—transformed by a grey beard and hair and dismal mask into Charon.

But so unused to navigation was he, so crazy and ill-trimmed his craft, that his first performance would have been his submersion in the Styx had not Berenger, better accustomed to boats than any of the *dramatis personæ*, caught him by the arm as he was about to step in, pointed out the perils, weighted the frail vessel, and given him a lesson in paddling it to and fro, with such a masterly hand, that, had there been time for a change of dress, the part of Charon would have been unanimously transferred to him; but the delay could not be suffered, and poor Méricour, in fear of a ducking, or worse, of ridicule, balanced himself, pole in hand, in the midst of the river. To the right of the river was Elysium—a circular island revolving on a wheel which was an absolute orrery, representing in concentric circles the skies, with the sun, moon, the seven planets, twelve signs, and the fixed stars, all illuminated with small lamps. The island itself was covered with verdure, in which, among bowers woven of gay flowers, reposed twelve nymphs of Paradise, of whom Eustacie was one.

On the other side of the stream was another wheel, whose grisly emblems were reminders of Dante's infernal circles, and were lighted by lurid flames, while little bells were hung round so as to make a harsh jangling sound, and all of the Court who had any turn for buffoonery were leaping and dancing about as demons beneath it, and uttering wild shouts.

King Charles and his two brothers stood on the margin of the Elysian lake. King Henry, the Prince of Condé, and a selection of the younger and gayer Huguenots, were the assailants,—storming Paradise to gain possession of the nymphs. It was a very illusive armour that they wore, thin scales of gold or silver as cuirasses over their satin doublets, and the swords and lances of festive combat in that Court had been of the bluntest foil ever since the father of these princes had died beneath Montgomery's spear. And when the King and

his brothers, one of them a puny crooked boy, were the champions, the battle must needs be the merest show, though there were lookers-on who thought that, judging by appearances, the assailants ought to have the best chance of victory, both literal and allegorical.

However, these three guardian angels had choice allies in the shape of the infernal company, who, as fast as the Huguenots crossed swords or shivered lances with their royal opponents, encircled them with their long black arms, and dragged them struggling away to Tartarus. Henry of Navarre yielded himself with a good-will to the horse-play with which this was performed, resisting just enough to give his demoniacal captors a good deal of trouble, while yielding all the time, and taking them by surprise by agile efforts, that showed that if he were excluded from Paradise it was only by his own consent, and that he heartily enjoyed the merriment. Most of his comrades, in especial the young Count de Rochefoucauld, entered into the sport with the same heartiness, but the Prince of Condé submitted to his fate with a gloomy, disgusted countenance, that added much to the general mirth; and Berenger, with Eustacie before his eyes, looking pale, distressed, and ill at ease, was a great deal too much in earnest. He had so veritable an impulse to leap forward and snatch her from that giddy revolving prison, that he struck against the sword of Monsieur with a hearty good-will. His silvered lath snapped in his hand, and at that moment he was seized round the waist, and, when his furious struggle was felt to be in earnest, he was pulled over on his back, while yells and shouts of discordant laughter rang round him, as demons pinioned him hand and foot.

He thought he heard a faint cry from Eustacie, and, with a sudden, unexpected struggle, started into a sitting posture;

but a derisive voice, that well he knew, cried, "Ha, the deadly sin of pride! Monsieur thinks his painted face pleases the ladies. To the depths with him—" and therewith one imp pulled him backwards again, while others danced a war-dance round him, pointing their forks at him; and the prime tormentor, whom he perfectly recognised, not only leapt over him, but spurned at his face with a cloven foot, giving a blow, not of gay French malice, but of malignity. It was too much for the boy's forbearance. He struggled free, dashing his adversaries aside fiercely, and as they again gathered about him, with the leader shouting, "Rage, too, rage! To the prey, imps—" he clenched his fist, and dealt the foremost foe such a blow on the chest as to level him at once with the ground.

"Monsieur forgets," said a voice, friendly yet reproachful, "that this is but sport."

It was Henry of Navarre himself who spoke, and bent to give a hand to the fallen imp. A flush of shame rushed over Berenger's face, already red with passion. He felt that he had done wrong to use his strength at such a moment, and that, though there had been spite in his assailant, he had not been therefore justified. He was glad to see Narcisse rise lightly to his feet, evidently unhurt, and, with the frankness with which he had often made it up with Philip Thistlewood or his other English comrades after a sharp tussle, he held out his hand, saying, "Good demon, your pardon. You roused my spirit, and I forgot myself."

"Demons forget not," was the reply. "At him, imps!" And a whole circle of hobgoblins closed upon with their tridents, forks, and other horrible implements, to drive him back within two tall barred gates, which, illuminated by red flames, were to form the ghastly prison of the vanquished. Perhaps fresh indignities would have been attempted, had not

the King of Navarre thrown himself on his side, shared with him the brunt of all the grotesque weapons, and battled them off with infinite spirit and address, shielding him as it were from their rude insults by his own dexterity and inviolability, though retreating all the time till the infernal gates were closed on both.

Then Henry of Navarre, who never forgot a face, held out his hand, saying, "Tartarus is no region of good omen for friendships, M. de Ribaumont, but, for lack of yonder devil's claw, here is mine. I like to meet a comrade who can strike a hearty blow, and ask a hearty pardon."

"I was too hot, Sire," confessed Berenger, with one of his ingenuous blushes, "but he enraged me."

"He means mischief," said Henry. "Remember, if you are molested respecting this matter, that you have here a witness that you did the part of a gentleman."

Berenger bowed his thanks, and began something about the honour, but his eye anxiously followed the circuit on which Eustacie was carried, and the glance was quickly remarked.

"How? Your heart is spinning in that Mahometan paradise, and that is what put such force into your fists. Which of the houris is it? The little one with the wistful eyes, who looked so deadly white and shrieked out when the devilry overturned you? Eh! Monsieur, you are a happy man."

"I should be, Sire;" and Berenger was on the point of confiding the situation of his affairs to this most engaging of princes, when a fresh supply of prisoners, chased with wild antics and fiendish yells by the devils, came headlong in on them; and immediately, completing, as Henry said, the galimatias of mythology, a pasteboard cloud was propelled on the stage, and disclosed the deities Mercury and Cupid, who made a complimentary address to the three princely brothers, inciting them to claim the nymphs whom their valour had

defended, and lead them through the mazes of a choric celestial dance.

This dance had been the special device of Monsieur and the ballet-master, and during the last three days the houris had been almost danced off their legs with rehearsing it morning, noon, and night, but one at least of them was scarcely in a condition for its performance. Eustacie, dizzied at the first minute by the whirl of her Elysian merry-go-round, had immediately after become conscious of that which she had been too childish to estimate merely in prospect, the exposure to universal gaze. Strange staring eyes, glaring lights, frightful imps seemed to wheel round her in an intolerable delirious succession. Her only refuge was in closing her eyes, but even this could not long be persevered in, so necessary a part of the pageant was she; and besides, she had Berenger to look for, Berenger, whom she had foolishly laughed at for knowing how dreadful it would be. But of course the endeavour to seek for one object with her eyes made the dizziness even more dreadful; and when, at length, she beheld him dragged down by the demoniacal creatures, whose horrors were magnified by her confused senses, and the next moment she was twirled out of sight, her cry of distracted alarm was irrepressible. Carried round again and again, on a wheel that to her was far more like Ixion's than that of the spheres, she never cleared her perceptions as to where he was, and only was half-maddened by the fantastic whirl of incongruous imagery, while she barely sat out Mercury's lengthy harangue; and when her wheel stood still, and she was released, she could not stand, and was indebted to Charon and one of her fellow nymphs for supporting her to a chair in the back of the scene. Kind Charon hurried to bring her wine, the lady revived her with essences, and the ballet-master clamoured for his performers.

Ill or well, royal ballets must be danced. One long sob, one gaze round at the refreshing sight of a room no longer in motion, one wistful look at the gates of Tartarus, and the misery of the throbbing, aching head must be disregarded. The ballet-master touched the white cheeks with rouge, and she stepped forward just in time, for Monsieur himself was coming angrily forward to learn the cause of the delay.

Spectators said the windings of that dance were exquisitely graceful. It was well that Eustacie's drilling had been so complete, for she moved through it blindly, senselessly, and when it was over was led back between the two Demoiselles de Limeuil to the apartment that served as a green-room, drooping and almost fainting. They seated her in a chair, and consulted round her, and her cousin Narcisse was among the first to approach ; but no sooner had she caught sight of his devilish trim than with a little shriek she shut her eyes, and flung herself to the other side of the chair.

"My fair cousin," he said, opening his black vizard, "do you not see me ? I am no demon, remember ! I am your cousin."

"That makes it no better," said Eustacie, too much disordered and confused to be on her guard, and hiding her face with her hands. "Go, go, I entreat."

"Nay, my fair one, I cannot leave you thus ! Shall I send for my father to take you home ?"

In fact he had already done this, and the ladies added their counsel ; for indeed the poor child could scarcely hold up her head, but she said, "I should like to stay, if I could : a little, a little longer. Will they not open those dreadful bars ?" she added, presently.

"They are even now opening them," said Mdlle. de Limeuil. "Hark ! they are going to fight *en mêlée*. Mdlle. de Nid-de-Merle is better now ?"

"Oh yes ; let me not detain you."

Eustacie would have risen, but the two sisters had fluttered back, impatient to lose nothing of the sports; and her cousin in his grim disguise stood full before her. "No haste, cousin," he said; "you are not fit to move."

"Oh, then go," said Eustacie, suffering too much not to be petulant. "You make me worse."

"And why? It was not always thus," began Narcisse, so eager to seize an opportunity as to have little consideration for her condition; but she was unable to bear any more, and broke out: "Yes, it was; I always detested you. I detest you more than ever, since you deceived me so cruelly. Oh, do but leave me!"

"You scorn me, then! You prefer to me—who have loved you so long—that childish new-comer, who was ready enough to cast you off."

"Prefer! He is my husband! It is an insult for any one else to speak to me thus!" said Eustacie, drawing herself up, and rising to her feet; but she was forced to hold by the back of her chair, and Diane and her father appearing at that moment, she tottered towards the former, and becoming quite passive under the influence of violent dizziness and headache, made no objection to being half led, half carried, through galleries that connected the Hôtel de Bourbon with the Louvre.

And thus it was that when Berenger had fought out his part in the *mêlée* of the prisoners released, and had maintained the honours of the rose-coloured token in his helmet, he found that his lady-love had been obliged by indisposition to return home; and while he stood, folding his arms to restrain their strong inclination to take Narcisse by the throat and demand whether this were another of his deceptions, a train of fireworks suddenly exploded in the middle of the Styx—a last surprise, especially contrived by King Charles, and so effectual that half the ladies were shrieking, and

imagining that they and the whole hall had blown up together.

A long supper, full of revelry, succeeded, and at length Sidney and Ribaumont walked home together in the midst of their armed servants bearing torches. All the way home Berenger was bitter in vituperation of the hateful pageant and all its details.

"Yea, truly," replied Sidney; "methought that it betokens disease in the mind of a nation when their festive revelry is thus ghastly, rendering the most awful secrets made known by our God in order to warn man from sin into a mere antic laughing-stock. Laughter should be moved by what is fair and laughter-worthy—even like such sports as our own 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' I have read that the bloody temper of Rome fed itself in gladiator shows, and verily, what we beheld to-night betokens something at once grisly and light-minded in the mood of this country."

Sidney thought so the more when on the second ensuing morning the Admiral de Coligny was shot through both hands by an assassin generally known to have been posted by the Duke of Guise, yet often called by the sinister sobriquet of *Le Tueur du Roi.*

CHAPTER XI.

THE KING'S TRAGEDY.

"The night is come, no fears disturb
The sleep of innocence.
They trust in kingly faith, and kingly oath.
They sleep, alas! they sleep.
Go to the palace, wouldst thou know
How hideous night can be;
Eye is not closed in those accursed walls,
Nor heart is quiet there!"

SOUTHEY, *Bartholomew's Eve.*

"YOUNG gentlemen," said Sir Francis Walsingham, as he rose from dinner on the Saturday, "are you bound for the palace this evening?"

"I am, so please your Excellency," returned Berenger.

"I would have you both to understand that you must have a care of yourselves," said the Ambassador. "The Admiral's wound has justly caused much alarm, and I hear that the Protestants are going vapouring about in so noisy and incautious a manner, crying out for justice, that it is but too likely that the party of the Queen-mother and the Guises will be moved to strong measures."

"They will never dare lay a finger upon us!" said Sidney.

"In a terror-stricken fray men are no respecters of persons," replied Sir Francis. "This house is, of course, inviolable; and, whatever the madness of the people, we have stout

hearts enough here to enforce respect thereto; but I cannot answer even for an Englishman's life beyond its precincts; and you, Ribaumont, whom I cannot even claim as my Queen's subject—I greatly fear to trust you beyond its bounds."

"I cannot help it, Sir. Nay, with the most grateful thanks for all your goodness to me, I must pray you not to take either alarm or offence if I return not this night."

"No more, my friend," said Walsingham, quickly; "let me know nothing of your purposes, but take care of yourself. I would you were safe at home again, though the desire may seem inhospitable. The sooner the better with whatever you have to do."

"Is the danger so imminent?" asked Sidney.

"I know nothing, Philip. All I can tell is that, as I have read that dogs and cattle scent an earthquake in the air, so men and women seem to breathe a sense of danger in this city. And to me the graciousness with which the Huguenots have been of late treated wears a strangely suspicious air. Sudden and secret is the blow like to be, and we cannot be too much on our guard. Therefore remember, my young friends both, that your danger or death would fall heavily on those ye love and honour at home."

So saying, he left the two youths, unwilling to seek further confidence, and Berenger held his last consultation with Sidney, to whom he gave directions for making full explanation to Walsingham in his absence, and expediting Mr. Adderley's return to England. Osbert alone was to go to the Louvre with him, after having seen the five English grooms on board the little decked market-vessel on the Seine, which was to await the fugitives. Berenger was to present himself in the palace as in his ordinary Court attendance, and, contriving to elude notice among the throng who were there

lodged, was to take up his station at the foot of the stairs leading to the apartments of the ladies, whence Eustacie was to descend at about eleven o'clock, with her maid Véronique. Landry Osbert was to join them from the lackeys' hall below, where he had a friend, and the connivance of the porter at the postern opening towards the Seine had been secured.

Sidney wished much to accompany him to the palace, if his presence could be any aid or protection, but on consideration it was decided that his being at the Louvre was likely to attract notice to Ribaumont's delaying there. The two young men therefore shook hands and parted, as youths who trusted that they had begun a lifelong friendship, with mutual promises to write to one another—the one, the adventures of his flight; the other, the astonishment it would excite. And auguries were exchanged of merry meetings in London, and of the admiration the lovely little wife would excite at Queen Elizabeth's court.

Then, with an embrace such as English friends then gave, they separated at the gate; and Sidney stood watching, as Berenger walked free and bold down the street, his sword at his side, his cloak over one shoulder, his feathered cap on one side, showing his bright curling hair, a sunshiny picture of a victorious bridegroom—such a picture as sent Philip Sidney's wits back to Arcadia.

It was not a day of special state, but the palace was greatly crowded. The Huguenots were in an excited mood, inclined to rally round Henry of Navarre, whose royal title made him be looked on as in a manner their monarch, though his kingdom had been swallowed by Spain, and he was no more than a French Duke distantly related to royalty in the male line, and more nearly through his grandmother and bride. The eight hundred gentlemen he had brought with him swarmed about his apartments, making their lodging on

staircases and in passages ; and to Berenger it seemed as if the King's guards and Monsieur's gentlemen must have come in in equal numbers to balance them. Narcisse was there, and Berenger kept cautiously amid his Huguenot acquaintance, resolved not to have a quarrel thrust on him which he could not honourably desert. It was late before he could work his way to the young Queen's reception-room, where he found Eustacie. She looked almost as white as at the masque ; but there was a graver, less childish expression in her face than he had ever seen before, and her eyes glanced confidence when they met his.

Behind the Queen's chair a few words could be spoken.

"*Ma mie*, art thou well again? Canst bear this journey now?"

"Quite well, now! quite ready. Oh that we may never have masques in England!"

He smiled—"Never such as this!"

"Ah! thou knowest best. I am glad I am thine already ; I am so silly, thou wouldest never have chosen me! But thou wilt teach me, and I will strive to be very good! And oh! let me but give one farewell to Diane."

"It is too hard to deny thee aught to-night, sweetheart, but judge for thyself. Think of the perils, and decide."

Before Eustacie could answer, a rough voice came near, the King making noisy sport with the Count de Rochefoucauld and others. He was louder and ruder than Berenger had ever yet seen him, almost giving the notion of intoxication ; but neither he nor his brother Henry ever tasted wine, though both had a strange pleasure in being present at the orgies of their companions : the King, it was generally said, from love of the self-forgetfulness of excitement—the Duke of Anjou, because his cool brain there collected men's secrets to serve afterwards for his spiteful diversion.

Berenger would willingly have escaped notice, but his bright face and sunny hair always made him conspicuous, and the King suddenly strode up to him, "You here, sir! I thought you would have managed your affairs so as to be gone long ago!" then before Berenger could reply, "However, since here you are, come along with me to my bedchamber! We are to have a carouse there to-night that will ring through all Paris! Yes, and shake Rochefoucauld out of his bed at midnight! You will be one of us, Ribaumont? I command it!"

And without waiting for reply he turned away with an arm round Rochefoucauld's neck, and boisterously addressed another of the company, almost as wildly as if he were in the mood that Scots call "fey."

"Royalty seems determined to frustrate our plans," said Berenger, as soon as the King was out of hearing.

"But you will not go! His comrades drink till—oh! two, three in the morning. We should never get away."

"No, I must risk his displeasure. We shall soon be beyond his reach. But at least I may make his invitation a reason for remaining in the Louvre. People are departing! Soon wilt thou be my own."

"As soon as the Queen's *coucher* is over! I have but to change to a travelling dress."

"At the foot of the winding stair. Sweetest, be brave!"

"I fear nothing with thee to guard me. See, the Queen is rising."

Elisabeth was in effect rising to make her respectful progress to the rooms of the Queen-mother, to bid her goodnight; and Eustacie must follow. Would Diane be there? Oh that the command to judge between her heart and her caution had not been given! Cruel kindness!

Diane was there, straight as a poplar, cold as marble, with

fixed eyes. Eustacie stole up to her, and touched her. She turned with a start. "Cousin, you have been very good to me!" Diane started again, as if stung. "You will love me still, whatever you hear?"

"Is this meant for farewell?" said Diane, grasping her wrist.

"Do not ask me, Diane. I may not."

"Where there is no trust there is no treason," said Diane, dreamily. "No, answer me not, little one, there will be time for that another day. Where is he?"

"In the *œil-de-bœuf*, between the King's and Queen's suites of rooms. I must go. There is the Queen going. Diane, one loving word."

"Silly child, you shall have plenty another time," said Diane, breaking away. "Follow thy Queen now!"

Catherine, who sat between her daughters Claude and Marguerite, looked pre-occupied, and summarily dismissed her daughter-in-law, Elisabeth, whom Eustacie was obliged to follow to her own state-room. There all the forms of the *coucher* were tediously gone through; every pin had its own ceremony, and even when her Majesty was safely deposited under her blue satin coverlet the ladies still stood round till she felt disposed to fall asleep. Elisabeth was both a sleepy and a considerate person, so that this was not so protracted a vigil as was sometimes exacted by the more wakeful princesses; but Eustacie could not escape from it till it was already almost midnight, the period for her tryst.

Her heart was very full. It was not the usual flutter and terror of an eloping girl. Eustacie was a fearless little being, and her conscience had no alarms; her affections were wholly with Berenger, and her transient glimpses of him had been as of something come out of a region higher, tenderer, stronger, purer, more trustworthy than that where she had

dwelt. She was proud of belonging to him. She had felt upheld by the consciousness through years of waiting, and now he more than realized her hopes, and she could have wept for exulting joy. Yet it was a strange, stealthy break with all she had to leave behind. The light to which he belonged seemed strange, chill, dazzling light, and she shivered at the thought of it, as if the new world, new ideas, and new requirements could only be endured with him to shield her and help her on. And withal, there seemed to her a shudder over the whole place on that night. The King's eyes looked wild and startled, the Queen-mother's calm was strained, the Duchess of Lorraine was evidently in a state of strong nervous excitement; there were strange sounds, strange people moving about, a weight on everything, as if they were under the shadow of a thunder-cloud. "Could it be only her own fancy?" she said to herself, because this was to be the great event of her life, for surely all these great people could not know or heed that little Eustacie de Ribaumont was to make her escape that night!

The trains of royalty were not sumptuously lodged. France never has cared so much for comfort as for display. The waiting-lady of the bedchamber slept in the ante-room of her mistress; the others, however high their rank, were closely herded together up a winding stair leading to a small passage, with tiny, cell-like recesses, wherein the demoiselles slept, often with their maids, and then dressed themselves in the space afforded by the passage. Eustacie's cell was nearly at the end of the gallery, and, exchanging "good nights" with her companions, she proceeded to her recess, where she expected to find Véronique ready to adjust her dress. Véronique, however, was missing; but anxious to lose no time, she had taken off her delicate white satin

farthingale to change it for an unobtrusive dark woollen kirtle, when, to her surprise and dismay, a loud creaking, growling sound made itself heard outside the door at the other end. Half-a-dozen heads came out of their cells ; half-a-dozen voices asked and answered the question, "What is it?" "They are bolting our door outside." But only Eustacie sped like lightning along the passage, pulled at the door, and cried, "Open! Open, I say!" No answer, but the other bolt creaked.

"You mistake, *concierge!* We are never bolted in! My maid is shut out."

No answer, but the step retreated. Eustacie clasped her hands with a cry that she could hardly have repressed, but which she regretted the next moment.

Gabrielle de Limeuil laughed. "What, Mademoiselle, are you afraid they will not let us out to-morrow?"

"My maid!" murmured Eustacie, recollecting that she must give a colour to her distress.

"Ah! perhaps she will summon old Pierre to open for us."

This suggestion somewhat consoled Eustacie, and she stood intently listening for Véronique's step, wishing that her companions would hold their peace; but the adventure amused them, and they discussed whether it were a blunder of the *concierge*, or a piece of prudery of Madame la Comtesse, or, after all, a precaution. The palace so full of strange people, who could say what might happen? And there was a talk of a conspiracy of the Huguenots. At any rate, every one was too much frightened to go to sleep, and, some sitting on the floor, some on a chest, some on a bed, the girls huddled together in Gabrielle de Limeuil's recess, the nearest to the door, and one after another related horrible tales of blood, murder, and vengeance—then, alas! only too frequent occurrences in their unhappy land—each bringing some frightful

contribution from her own province, each enhancing upon the last-told story, and ever and anon pausing with bated breath at some fancied sound, or supposed start of one of the others; then clinging close together, and renewing the ghastly anecdote, at first in a hushed voice that grew louder with the interest of the story. Eustacie alone would not join the cluster. Her cloak round her shoulders, she stood with her back against the door, ready to profit by the slightest indication outside of a step that might lead to her release, or at least enable her to communicate with Véronique; longing ardently that her companions would go to bed, yet unable to avoid listening with the like dreadful fascination to each of the terrible histories, which added each moment to the nervous horror of the whole party. Only one, a dull and composed girl, felt the influence of weariness, and dozed with her head in her companion's lap; but she was awakened by one general shudder and suppressed cry when the hoarse clang of a bell struck on the ears of the already terrified, excited maidens.

"The tocsin! The bell of St. Germain! Fire! No, a Huguenot rising! Fire! Oh, let us out! Let us out! The window! Where is the fire? Nowhere! See the lights! Hark, that was a shot! It was in the palace! A heretic rising! Ah! there was to be a slaughter of the heretics! I heard it whispered. Oh, let us out! Open the door!"

But nobody heard: nobody opened. There was one who stood without word or cry, close to the door—her eyes dilated, her cheek colourless, her whole person, soul and body alike, concentrated in that one impulse to spring forward the first moment the bolt should be drawn. But still the door remained fast shut!

CHAPTER XII.

THE PALACE OF SLAUGHTER.

"A human shambles with blood-reeking floor."
MISS SWANWICK, *Æsch. Agamemnon.*

THE door was opened at last, but not till full daylight. It found Eustacie as ready to rush forth, past all resistance, as she had been the night before, and she was already in the doorway when her maid Véronique, her face swollen with weeping, caught her by the hands and implored her to turn back and listen.

And words about a rising of the Huguenots, a general destruction, corpses lying in the court—were already passing between the other maidens and the *concierge.* Eustacie turned upon her servant; "Véronique, what means it? Where is he?"

"Alas! alas! Ah! Mademoiselle, do but lie down! Woe is me! I saw it all! Lie down, and I will tell you."

"Tell! I will not move till you have told me where my husband is," said Eustacie, gazing with eyes that seemed to Véronique turned to stone.

"Ah! my lady—my dear lady! I was on the turn of the stairs, and saw all. The traitor—the Chevalier Narcisse—came on him, cloaked like you—and—shot him dead—with, oh, such cruel words of mockery! Oh! woe the day! Stay, stay, dear lady, the place is all blood—they are slaying them

all—all the Huguenots! Will no one stop her?—Mademoiselle—ma'm'selle!—"

For Eustacie no sooner gathered the sense of Véronique's words than she darted suddenly forwards, and was in a few seconds more at the foot of the stairs. There, indeed, lay a pool of dark gore, and almost in it Berenger's black velvet cap, with the heron plume. Eustacie, with a low cry, snatched it up, continued her headlong course along the corridor, swiftly as a bird, Véronique following, and vainly shrieking to her to stop. Diane, appearing at the other end of the gallery, saw but for a moment the little figure, with the cloak gathered round her neck, and floating behind her, understood Véronique's cry and joined in the chase across hall and gallery, where more stains were to be seen, even down to the marble stairs, every step slippery with blood. Others there were who saw and stood aghast, not understanding the apparition that flitted on so swiftly, never pausing till at the great door at the foot of the stairs she encountered a gigantic Scottish archer, armed to the teeth. She touched his arm, and standing with folded arms, looked up and said, "Good soldier, kill me! I am a Huguenot!"

"Stop her! bring her back!" cried Diane from behind. "It is Mdlle. de Nid-de-Merle!"

"No, no! My husband is Huguenot! I am a Huguenot! Let them kill me, I say!"—struggling with Diane, who had now come up with her, and was trying to draw her back.

"Puir lassie!" muttered the stout Scotsman to himself, "this fearsome night has driven her demented."

But, like a true sentinel, he moved neither hand nor foot to interfere, as shaking herself loose from Diane, she was springing down the steps into the court, when at that moment the young Abbé de Méricour was seen advancing, pale, breathless, horror-struck, and to him Diane shrieked to arrest

the headlong course. He obeyed, seeing the wild distraction of the white face and widely glaring eyes, took her by both hands, and held her in a firm grasp, saying, "Alas, lady, you cannot go out. It is no sight for any one."

"They are killing the Protestants," she said; "I am one! Let me find them and die."

A strong effort to free herself ensued, but it was so suddenly succeeded by a swoon that the Abbé could scarcely save her from dropping on the steps. Diane begged him to carry her in, since they were in full view of men-at-arms in the court, and, frightful to say, of some of the ladies of the palace, who, in the frenzy of that dreadful time, had actually come down to examine the half-stripped corpses of the men with whom they had jested not twelve hours before.

"Ah! it is no wonder," said the youthful Abbé, as he tenderly lifted the inanimate figure. "This has been a night of horrors. I was coming in haste to know whether the King knows of this frightful plot of M. de Guise, and the bloody work that is passing in Paris."

"The King!" exclaimed Diane, "M. l'Abbé, do you know where he is now? In the balcony overlooking the river, taking aim at the fugitives! Take care! Even your *soutane* would not save you if M. d'O and his crew heard you. But I must pray you to aid me with this poor child! I dread that her wild cries should be heard."

The Abbé, struck dumb with horror, silently obeyed Mdlle. de Ribaumont, and brought the still insensible Eustacie to the chamber, now deserted by all the young ladies. He laid her on her bed, and finding he could do no more, left her to her cousin and her maid.

The poor child had been unwell and feverish ever since the masque, and the suspense of these few days with the tension of that horrible night had prostrated her. She only

awoke from her swoon to turn her head from the light and refuse to be spoken to.

"But, Eustacie, child, listen; this is all in vain—he lives," said Diane.

"Weary me not with falsehoods," faintly said Eustacie.

"No! no! no! They meant to hinder your flight, but—"

"They knew of it?" cried Eustacie, sitting up suddenly. "Then you told them. Go—go; let me never see you more! You have been his death!"

"Listen! I am sure he lives! What! would they injure one whom my father loved? I heard my father say he would not have him hurt. Depend upon it, he is safe on his way to England."

Eustacie gave a short but frightful hysterical laugh, and pointed to Véronique. "She saw it," she said; "ask her."

"Saw what?" said Diane, turning fiercely on Véronique. "What vile deceit have you half killed your lady with?"

"Alas! Mademoiselle, I did but tell her what I had seen," sighed Véronique, trembling.

"Tell me!" said Diane, passionately.

"Yes, everything," said Eustacie, sitting up.

"Ah! Mademoiselle, it will make you ill again."

"I *will* be ill—I *will* die! Heaven's slaying is better than man's. Tell her how you saw Narcisse."

"False girl!" burst out Diane.

"No, no," cried Véronique. "Oh, pardon me, Mademoiselle, I could not help it."

In spite of her reluctance, she was forced to tell that she had found herself locked out of her mistress's room, and after losing much time in searching for the *concierge*, learnt that the ladies were locked up by order of the Queen-mother, and

was strongly advised not to be running about the passages. After a time, however, while sitting with the *concierge's* wife, she heard such frightful whispers from men with white badges, who were admitted one by one by the porter, and all led silently to a small lower room, that she resolved on seeking out the Baron's servant, and sending him to warn his master, while she would take up her station at her lady's door. She found Osbert, and with him was ascending a narrow spiral leading from the offices—she, unfortunately, the foremost. As she came to the top, a scuffle was going on—four men had thrown themselves upon one, and a torch distinctly showed her the younger Chevalier holding a pistol to the cheek of the fallen man, and she heard the words, "*Le baiser d'Eustacie! Je te barbouillerai ce chien de visage,*" and at the same moment the pistol was discharged. She sprang back, oversetting, as she believed, Osbert, and fled shrieking to the room of the *concierge*, who shut her in till morning.

"And how—how," stammered Diane, "should you know it was the Baron?"

Eustacie, with a death-like look, showed for a moment what even in her swoon she had held clenched to her bosom, the velvet cap soaked with blood.

"Besides," added Véronique, resolved to defend her assertion, "whom else would the words suit? Besides, are not all the heretic gentlemen dead? Why, as I sat there in the porter's room, I heard M. d'O call each one of them by name, one after the other, into the court, and there the white-sleeves cut them down or pistolled them like sheep for the slaughter. They lie all out there on the terrace like so many carcases at market ready for winter salting."

"All slain?" said Eustacie, dreamily.

"All, except those that the King called into his own *garde robe.*"

"Then, I slew him!" Eustacie sank back.

"I tell you, child," said Diane, almost angrily, "he lives. Not a hair of his head was to be hurt! The girl deceives you."

But Eustacie had again become insensible, and awoke delirious, entreating to have the door opened, and fancying herself still on the revolving elysium, "Oh, demons! demons, have pity!" was her cry.

Diane's soothings were like speaking to the winds; and at last she saw the necessity of calling in further aid; but afraid of the scandal that the poor girl's raving accusations might create, she would not send for the Huguenot surgeon, Ambroise Paré, whom the King had carefully secured in his own apartments, but employed one of the barber valets of the Queen-mother's household. Poor Eustacie was well pleased to see her blood flowing, and sank back on her pillow murmuring that she had confessed her husband's faith, and would soon be one with him, and Diane feared for a moment lest the swoon should indeed be death.

The bleeding was so far effectual that it diminished the fever, and Eustacie became rational again when she had dozed and wakened, but she was little able or willing to speak, and would not so much as listen to Diane's asseverations that Véronique had made a frightful error, and that the Baron would prove to be alive. Whether it were that the admission that Diane had known of the project for preventing the elopement that invalidated her words, or whether the sufferer's instinct made her believe Véronique's testimony rather than her cousin's assurances, it was all "cramming words into her ear against the stomach of her sense," and she turned away from them with a piteous, petulant hopelessness: "Could they not even let her alone to die in peace!"

Diane was almost angered at this little silly child being in such an agony of sorrow—she, who could never have known how to love him. And after all this persistent grief was wilfully thrown away. For Diane spoke in perfect sincerity when she taxed Véronique with an injurious, barbarous mistake. She knew her father's strong aversion to violence, and the real predilection that Berenger's good mien, respectful manners, and liberal usage had won from him, and she believed he had much rather the youth lived, provided he were inoffensive. No doubt a little force had been necessary to kidnap one so tall, active, and determined, and Véronique had made up her horrible tale after the usual custom of waiting-maids.

Nothing else *should* be true. Did she think otherwise, she should be even more frantic than Eustacie! Why, it would be her own doing! She had betrayed the day of the escape—she had held aloof from warning. There was pleasure in securing Nid-de-Merle for her brother, pleasure in baulking the foolish child who had won the heart that disregarded her. Nay, there might have been even pleasure in the destruction of the scorner of her charms—the foe of her house—there might have been pride in receiving Queen Catherine's dexterous hint that she had been an apt pupil if the young Baron had only been something different—something less fair, gracious, bright, and pure. One bright angel seemed to have flitted across her path, and nothing should induce her to believe she had destroyed him.

The stripped corpses of the murdered Huguenots of the palace had been laid in a line on the terrace, and the ladies who had laughed with them the night before went to inspect them in death. A few remnants of Sœur Monique's influence would have withheld Diane, but that a frenzy of suspense was growing on her. She must see for herself.

If it were so, she must secure a fragment of the shining flaxen hair, if only as a token that anything so pure and bright had walked the earth.

She went on the horrible quest, shrinking where others stared. For it was a pitiless time, and the squadron of the Queen-mother were as lost to womanhood as the fishwomen of two centuries later. But Diane saw no corpse at once so tall, so young, and so fair, though blond Normans and blue-blooded Franks, lads scarce sixteen and stalwart warriors, lay in one melancholy rank. She at least bore away the certainty that the English Ribaumont was not there; and if not, he *must* be safe! She could obtain no further certainty, for she knew that she must not expect to see either her father or brother. There was a panic throughout the city. All Paris imagined that the Huguenots were on the point of rising and slaying all the Catholics, and, with the savagery of alarmed cowardice, the citizens and the mob were assisting the armed bands of the Dukes of Anjou and Guise to complete the slaughter, dragging their lodgers from their hiding-places, and denouncing all whom they suspected of reluctance to mass and confession. But on the Monday, Diane was able to send an urgent message to her father that he must come to speak with her, for Mdlle. de Nid-de-Merle was extremely ill. She would meet him in the garden after morning mass.

There accordingly, when she stepped forth pale, rigid, but stately, with her large fan in her hand to serve as a parasol, she met both him and her brother. She was for a moment sorry, for she had much power over her father, while she was afraid of her brother's sarcastic tongue and eye; she knew he never scrupled to sting her wherever she was most sensitive, and she would have been able to extract much more from her father in his absence. France has

never been without a tendency to produce the tiger-monkey, or ferocious fop; and the *genus* was in its full ascendency under the sons of Catherine de Medicis, when the dregs of François the First's *Pseudo*-chivalry were not extinct—when horrible, retaliating civil wars of extermination had made life cheap; nefarious persecutions had hardened the heart and steeled the eye, and the licentiousness promoted by the shifty Queen as one of her instruments of government had darkened the whole understanding. The most hateful heights of perfidy, effeminacy, and hypocrisy were not reached till poor Charles IX, who only committed crimes on compulsion, was in his grave, and Henry III. on the throne; but Narcisse de Ribaumont was one of the choice companions of the latter, and after the night and day of murder now stood before his sister with scented hair and handkerchief—the last, laced, delicately held by a hand in an embroidered glove—emerald pendants in his ears, a moustache twisted into sharp points and turned up like an eternal sardonic smile, and he led a little white poodle by a rose-coloured ribbon.

"Well, sister," he said, as he went through the motions of kissing her hand, and she embraced her father; "so you don't know how to deal with megrims and transports?"

"Father," said Diane, not vouchsafing any attention, "unless you can send her some assurance of his life, I will not answer for the consequences."

Narcisse laughed: "Take her this dog, with my compliments. That is the way to deal with such a child as that."

"You do not know what you say, brother," answered Diane with dignity. "It goes deeper than that."

"The deeper it goes, child," said the elder chevalier, "the better it is that she should be undeceived as soon as possible. She will recover, and be amenable the sooner."

"Then he lives, father?" exclaimed Diane. "He lives, though she is not to hear it—say——"

"What know I?" said the old man evasively. "On a night of confusion many mischances are sure to occur! Lurking in the palace at the very moment when there was a search for the conspirators, it would have been a miracle had the poor young man escaped."

Diane turned still whiter. "Then," she said, "that was why you made Monsieur put Eustacie into the ballet, that they might not go on Wednesday!"

"It was well hinted by you, daughter. We could not have effectually stopped them on Wednesday without making a scandal."

"Once more," said Diane, gasping, though still resolute; "is not the story told by Eustacie's woman false—that she saw him—pistolled—by you, brother!"

"Peste!" cried Narcisse. "Was the prying wench there? I thought the little one might be satisfied that he had neighbour's fare. No matter; what is done for one's *beaux yeux* is easily pardoned—and if not, why, I have her all the same!"

"Nevertheless, daughter," said the Chevalier gravely, "the woman must be silenced. Either she must be sent home, or taught so to swear to having been mistaken, that *la petite* may acquit your brother! But what now, my daughter?"

"She is livid!" exclaimed Narcisse, with his sneer. "What, sir, did not you know she was smitten with the peach on the top of a pole?"

"Enough, brother," said Diane, recovering herself enough to speak hoarsely, but with hard dignity. "You have slain —you need not insult, one whom you have lost the power of understanding!"

"Shallow schoolboys certainly form no part of my study,

save to kick them down stairs when they grow impudent," said Narcisse, coolly. "It is only women who think what is long must be grand."

"Come, children, no disputes," said the Chevalier. "Of course we regret that so fine a youth mixed himself up with the enemies of the kingdom, like the stork among the sparrows. Both Diane and I are sorry for the necessity; but remember, child, that when he was interfering between your brother and his just right of inheritance and destined wife, he could not but draw such a fate on himself. Now all is smooth, the estates will be united in their true head, and you—you too, my child, will be provided for as suits your name. All that is needed is to soothe the little one, so as to hinder her from making an outcry—and silence the maid; my child will do her best for her father's sake, and that of her family."

Diane was less demonstrative than most of her countrywomen. She had had time to recollect the uselessness of giving vent to her indignant anguish, and her brother's derisive look held her back. The family tactics, from force of habit, recurred to her; she made no further objection to her father's commands; but when her father and brother parted with her, she tottered into the now empty chapel, threw herself down, with her burning forehead on the stone step, and so lay for hours. It was not in prayer. It was because it was the only place where she could be alone. To her, heaven above and earth below seemed alike full of despair, darkness, and cruel habitations, and she lay like one sick with misery and repugnance to the life and world that lay before her—the hard world that had quenched that one fair light and mocked her pity. It was a misery of solitude, and yet no thought crossed her of going to weep and sympathise with the other sufferer. No; rivalry and jealousy came

in there! Eustacie viewed herself as his wife, and the very thought that she had been deliberately preferred and had enjoyed her triumph hardened Diane's heart against her. Nay, the open violence and abandonment of her grief seemed to the more restrained and concentrated nature of her elder a sign of shallowness and want of durability; and in a certain contemptuous envy at her professing a right to mourn, Diane never even reconsidered her own resolution to play out her father's game, consign Eustacie to her husband's murderer, and leave her to console herself with bridal splendours and a choice of admirers from all the court.

However, for the present Diane would rather stay away as much as possible from the sick-bed of the poor girl; and when an approaching step forced her to rouse herself and hurry away by the other door of the chapel, she did indeed mount to the ladies' bed-chamber, but only to beckon Véronique out of hearing, and ask for her mistress.

Just the same still, only sleeping to have feverish dreams of the revolving wheel or the demons grappling her husband, refusing all food but a little drink, and lying silent except for a few moans, heedless who spoke or looked at her.

Diane explained that in that case it was needless to come to her, but added, with the *vraisemblance* of falsehood in which she had graduated in Catherine's school, "Véronique, as I told you, you were mistaken."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, if M. le Baron lives, she will be cured at once."

"Silly girl," said Diane, giving relief to her pent-up feeling by asperity of manner, "how could he live when you and your intrigues got him into the palace on such a night? Dead he is, *of course;* but it was your own treacherous, mischievous fancy that laid it on my brother. He was far away with M. de Guise at the attack on the Admiral. It was

some of Monsieur's grooms you saw. You remember she had brought him into a scrape with Monsieur, and it was sure to be remembered. And look you, if you repeat the other tale, and do not drive it out of her head, you need not look to be long with her—no, nor at home. My father will have no one there to cause a scandal by an evil tongue."

That threat convinced Véronique that she had been right; but she, too, had learnt lessons at the Louvre, and she was too diplomatic not to ask pardon for her blunder, promise to contradict it when her mistress could listen, and express her satisfaction that it was not the Chevalier Narcisse—for such things were not pleasant, as she justly observed, in families.

About noon on the Tuesday the Louvre was unusually tranquil. All the world had gone forth to a procession to Notre-Dame, headed by the King and all the royal family, to offer thanksgiving for the deliverance of the country from the atrocious conspiracy of the Huguenots. Eustacie's chamber was freed from the bustle of all the maids of honour arraying themselves, and adjusting curls, feathers, ruffs and jewels; and such relief as she was capable of experiencing she felt in the quiet.

Véronique hoped she would sleep, and watched like a dragon to guard against any disturbance, springing out with up-raised finger when a soft gliding step and rustling of brocade was heard. "Does she sleep?" said a low voice; and Véronique, in the pale thin face with tear-swollen eyes and light yellow hair, recognised the young Queen. "My good girl," said Elisabeth, with almost a beseeching gesture, "let me see her. I do not know when again I may be able."

Véronique stood aside, with the lowest possible of curtseys, just as her mistress with a feeble, weary voice murmured, "Oh, make them let me alone!"

"My poor, poor child," said the Queen, bending over

Eustacie, while her brimming eyes let the tears fall fast, "I will not disturb you long, but I could not help it."

"Her Majesty!" exclaimed Eustacie, opening wide her eyes in amazement.

"My dear, suffer me here a little moment," said the meek Elisabeth, seating herself so as to bring her face near to Eustacie's; "I could not rest till I had seen how it was with you, and wept with you."

"Ah, Madame, you can weep," said Eustacie slowly, looking at the Queen's heavy tearful eyes almost with wonder; "but I do not weep because I am dying, and that is better."

"My dear, my dear, do not so speak!" exclaimed the gentle but rather dull Queen.

"Is it wrong? Nay, so much the better—then I shall be with *him*," said Eustacie in the same feeble dreamy manner, as if she did not understand herself, but a little roused by seeing she had shocked her visitor. "I would not be wicked. He was all bright goodness and truth: but his does not seem to be goodness that brings to heaven, and I do not want to be in the heaven of these cruel false men—I think it would go round and round." She shut her eyes as if to steady herself, and that moment seemed to give her more self-recollection, for looking at the weeping, troubled visitor, she exclaimed, with more energy, "Oh! Madame, it must be a dreadful fancy! Good men like him cannot be shut into those fiery gates with the torturing devils."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the Queen. "My poor, poor child, grieve not yourself thus. At my home, my Austrian home, we do not speak in this dreadful way. My father loves and honours his loyal Protestants, and he trusts that the good God accepts their holy lives in His unseen Church, even though outwardly they are separate from us. My

German confessor ever said so. Oh! child, it would be too frightful if we deemed that all those souls as well as bodies perished in these frightful days. Myself, I believe that they have their reward for their truth and constancy."

Eustacie caught the Queen's hand, and fondled it with delight, as though those words had veritably opened the gates of heaven to her husband. The Queen went on in her slow gentle manner, the very tone of which was inexpressibly soothing and sympathetic: "Yes, and all will be clear there. No more violence. At home our good men think so, and the King will think the same when these cruel counsellors will leave him to himself; and I pray, I pray day and night, that God will not lay this sin to his account, but open his eyes to repent. Forgive him, Eustacie, and pray for him too."

"The King would have saved my husband, Madame," returned Eustacie. "He bade him to his room. It was I, unhappy I, who detained him, lest our flight should have been hindered."

The Queen in her turn kissed Eustacie's forehead with eager gratitude. "Oh, little one, you have brought a drop of comfort to a heavy heart. Alas! I could sometimes feel you to be a happier wife than I, with your perfect trust in the brave pure-spirited youth, unwarped by these wicked cruel advisers. I loved to look at his open brow; it was so like our bravest German Junkers. And, child, we thought, both of us, to have brought about your happiness; but, ah! it has but caused all this misery."

"No, no, dearest Queen," said Eustacie, "this month with all its woe has been joy—life! Oh! I had rather lie here and die for his loss than be as I was before he came. And *now*—now, you have given him to me for all eternity—if but I am fit to be with him!"

Eustacie had revived so much during the interview that the

Queen could not believe her to be in a dying state; but she continued very ill, the low fever still hanging about her, and the faintness continual. The close room, the turmoil of its many inhabitants, and the impossibility of quiet also harassed her greatly, and Elisabeth had little or no power of making any other arrangements for her in the palace. Ladies when ill were taken home, and this poor child had no home. The other Maids of Honour were a gentler, simpler set than Catherine's squadron, and were far from unkind; but between them and her, who had so lately been the brightest child of them all, there now lay that great gulf. "*Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.*" That the little blackbird, as they used to call her, should have been on the verge of running away with her own husband was a half understood, amusing mystery discussed in exaggerating prattle. This was hushed indeed, in the presence of that crushed, prostrate, silent sorrow; but there was still an utter incapacity of true sympathy, that made the very presence of so many oppressive, even when they were not in murmurs discussing the ghastly tidings of massacres in other cities, and the fate of acquaintances.

On that same day, the Queen sent for Diane to consult her about the sufferer. Elisabeth longed to place her in her own cabinet and attend on her herself; but she was afraid to do this, as the unhappy King was in such a frenzied mood, and so constantly excited by his brother and Guise, that it was possible that some half-delirious complaint from poor Eustacie might lead to serious consequences. Indeed, Elisabeth, though in no state to bear agitation, was absorbed in her endeavour to prevent him from adding blood to blood, and a few days later actually saved the lives of the King of Navarre and Prince of Condé, by throwing herself before him half-dressed, and tearing his weapon from his hand. Her

only hope was that if she should give him a son, her influence for mercy would revive with his joy. Meantime she was powerless, and she could only devise the sending the poor little sufferer to a convent, where the nuns might tend her till she was restored to health and composure. Diane acquiesced, but proposed sending for her father, and he was accordingly summoned. Diane saw him first alone, and both agreed that he had better take Eustacie to Bellaise, where her aunt would take good care of her, and in a few months she would no doubt be weary enough of the country to be in raptures to return to Paris on any terms.

Yet even as Diane said this, a sort of longing for the solitude of the woods of Nid-de-Merle came over her, a recollection of the good Sister Monique, at whose knee she had breathed somewhat of the free pure air that her murdered cousin had brought with him; a sense that there she could pour forth her sorrow. She offered herself at once to go with Eustacie.

"No, no, my daughter," said the Chevalier, "that is unnecessary. There is pleasanter employment for you. I told you that your position was secured. Here is a brilliant offer —M. de Selinville."

"*Le bonhomme de Selinville!*" exclaimed Diane, feeling rather as if the compensation were like the little dog offered to Eustacie.

"Know ye not that his two heretic nephews perished the other night? He is now the head of his name, the Marquis, the only one left of his house."

"He begins early," said Diane.

"An old soldier, my daughter, scarce stays to count the fallen. He has no time to lose. He is sixty, with a damaged constitution. It will be but the affair of a few years, and then will my beautiful Marquise be free to choose for herself.

I shall go from the young Queen to obtain permission from the Queen-mother.

No question was asked. Diane never even thought objection possible. It was a close to that present life which she had begun to loathe: it gave comparative liberty. It would dull and confuse her heart-sick pain, and give her a certain superiority to her brother. Moreover, it would satisfy the old father, whom she really loved. Marriage with a worn-out old man was a simple step to full display for young ladies without fortune.

The Chevalier told Queen Elisabeth his purpose of placing his niece in the family convent, under the care of her aunt, the Abbess, in a foundation endowed by her own family on the borders of her own estate. Elisabeth would have liked to keep her nearer, but could not but own that the change to the scenes of her childhood might be more beneficial than a residence in a nunnery at Paris, and the Chevalier spoke of his niece with a tender solicitude that gained the Queen's heart. She consented, only stipulating that Eustacie's real wishes should be ascertained, and herself again made the exertion of visiting the patient for the purpose.

Eustacie had been partly dressed, and was lying as near as she could to the narrow window. The Queen would not let her move, but took her damp languid hand, and detailed her uncle's proposal. It was plain that it was not utterly distasteful. "Sœur Monique," she said, "Sœur Monique would sing hymns to me, and then I should not see the imps at night."

"Poor child! And you would like to go. You could bear the journey?"

"It would be in the air! And then I should not smell blood—blood!" And her cheeks became whiter again, if possible.

"Then you would not rather be at the Carmélites, or Maubuisson, near me?"

"Ah! Madame, there would not be Sœur Monique. If the journey would only make me die, as soon as I came, with Sœur Monique to hush me, and keep off dreadful images!"

"Dear child, you should put away the thought of dying. May be you are to live, that your prayers may win salvation for the soul of him you love."

"Oh, then! I should like to go into a convent so strict—so strict," cried Eustacie, with renewed vigour. "Bellaise is nothing like strict enough. Does your Majesty indeed think that my prayers will aid him?"

"Alas! what hope could we have but in praying?" said Elisabeth, with tears in her eyes. "Little one, we will be joined at least in our prayers and intercessions: thou wilt not forget in thine one who yet lives, unhappier than all!"

"And, oh, my good, my holy Queen, will you indeed pray for him—my husband? He was so good, his faith can surely not long be reckoned against him. He did not believe in Purgatory! Perhaps——" Then frowning with a difficulty far beyond a fever-clouded brain, she concluded —"At least, orisons may aid him! It is doing something for him! Oh, where are my beads?—I can begin at once."

The Queen put her arm round her, and together they said the *De profundis*,—the Queen understood every word far more for the living than the dead. Again Elisabeth had given new life to Eustacie. The intercession for her husband was something to live for, and the severest convent was coveted, until she was assured that she would not be allowed to enter on any rule till she had time to recover her health, and show the constancy of her purpose by a residence at Bellaise

Ere parting, however, the Queen bent over her, and colouring, as if much ashamed of what she said, whispered—"Child, not a word of the ceremony at Montpipeau!—you understand? The King was always averse; it would bring him and me into dreadful trouble with *those others*, and alas! it makes no difference now. You will be silent?"

And Eustacie signed her acquiescence, as indeed no difficulty was made in her being regarded as the widow of the Baron de Ribaumont, when she further insisted on procuring a widow's dress before she quitted her room, and declared, with much dignity, that she should esteem no person her friend who called her Mademoiselle de Nid-de-Merle. To this the Chevalier de Ribaumont was willing to give way; he did not care whether Narcisse married her as Berenger's widow or as the separated maiden wife, and he thought her vehement opposition and dislike would die away the faster the fewer impediments were placed in her way. Both he and Diane strongly discouraged any attempt on Narcisse's part at a farewell interview; and thus unmolested, and under the constant soothing influence of reciting her prayers, in the trust that they were availing her husband, Eustacie rallied so much that about ten days after the dreadful St. Bartholomew, in the early morning, she was half-led half-carried down the stairs between her uncle and Véronique. Her face was close muffled in her thick black veil, but when she came to the foot of the first stairs where she had found Berenger's cap, a terrible shuddering came on her; she again murmured something about the smell of blood, and fell into a swoon.

"Carry her on at once," said Diane, who was following,—"there will be no end to it if you do not remove her immediately."

And thus shielded from the sight of Narcisse's intended passionate gesture of farewell at the palace-door, Eustacie was laid at full length on the seat of the great ponderous family coach, where Véronique hardly wished to revive her till the eight horses should have dragged her beyond the streets of Paris, with their terrible associations, and the gibbets still hung with the limbs of the murdered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S ARRIVAL.

"The starling flew to his mother's window stane,
It whistled and it sang,
And aye, the ower word of the tune
Was 'Johnnie tarries lang.'"

Johnnie of Brodislee.

THERE had been distrust and dissatisfaction at home for many a day past. Berenger could hardly be censured for loving his own wife, and yet his family were by no means gratified by the prospect of his bringing home a little French Papist, of whom Lady Thistlewood remembered nothing good.

Lucy was indignantly fetched home by her stepmother, who insisted on treating her with extreme pity as a deserted maiden, and thus counteracting Aunt Cecily's wise representations, that there never should, and therefore never could, have been anything save fraternal affection between the young people, and that pity was almost an insult to Lucy. The good girl herself was made very uncomfortable by these demonstrations, and avoided them as much as possible, chiefly striving in her own gentle way to prepare her little sisters to expect numerous charms in brother Berenger's wife, and heartily agreeing with Philip that Berenger knew his own mind best.

"And at any rate," quoth Philip, "we'll have the best bonfire that ever was seen in the country! Lucy, you'll coax my father to give us a tar-barrel!"

The tar-barrel presided over a monstrous pile of fagots, and the fisher-boys were promised a tester to whoever should first bring word to Master Philip that the young lord and lady were in the creek.

Philip gave his pony no rest, between the look-out on the downs and the borders of the creek; but day after day passed, and still the smacks from Jersey held no person worth mentioning; and still the sense of expectation kept Lucy starting at every sound, and hating herself for her own folly.

At last Philip burst into Combe Manor, fiery red with riding and consternation. "Oh! father, father, Paul Duval's boat is come in, and he says that the villain Papists have butchered every Protestant in France."

Sir Marmaduke's asseveration was of the strongest, that he did not believe a word of it. Nevertheless, he took his horse and rode down to interrogate Paul Duval, and charge him not to spread the report lest he should alarm the ladies.

But the report was in the air. He went to the hall, and the butler met him with a grave face, and took him to the study, where Lord Walwyn was sitting over letters newly received from London, giving hints from the Low Countries of bloody work in France. And when he returned to his home, his wife burst out upon him in despair. Here had they been certainly killing her poor boy. Not a doubt that he was dead. All from this miserable going to France, that had been quite against her will.

Stoutly did Sir Marmaduke persevere in his disbelief; but every day some fresh wave of tidings floated in. Murder wholesale had surely been perpetrated. Now came

stories of death-bells at Rouen from the fishermen on the coast; now markets and petty sessions discussed the foul slaughter of the Ambassador and his household; truly related how the Queen had put on mourning, and falsely that she had hung the French Ambassador La Mothe Fénélon. And Burleigh wrote to his old friend from London, that some horrible carnage had assuredly taken place, and that no news had yet been received of Sir Francis Walsingham or of his suite.

All these days seemed so many years taken from the vital power of Lord Walwyn. Not only had his hopes and affections wound themselves closely around his grandson, but he reproached himself severely with having trusted him in his youth and inexperience among the seductive perils of Paris. The old man grieved over the promising young life cut off, and charged on himself the loss and grief to the women, whose stay he had trusted Berenger would have been. He said little, but his hand and head grew more trembling; he scarcely ate or slept, and seemed to waste from a vigorous elder to a feeble being in the extremity of old age, till Lady Walwyn had almost ceased to think of her grandson in her anxiety for her husband.

Letters came at last. The messenger despatched by Sir Francis Walsingham had not been able to proceed till the ways had become safe, and he had then been delayed; but on his arrival his tidings were sent down. There were letters both from Sir Francis Walsingham and from heart-broken Mr. Adderley, both to the same effect, with all possible praises of the young Baron de Ribaumont, all possible reproach to themselves for having let him be betrayed into this most horrible snare, in which he had perished, without even a possibility of recovering his remains for honourable burial. Poor Mr. Adderley further said that Mr. Sidney,

who was inconsolable for the loss of his friend, had offered to escort him to the Low Countries, whence he would make his way to England, and would present himself at Hurst Walwyn, if his Lordship could endure the sight of his creature who had so miserably failed in his trust.

Lord Walwyn read both letters twice through before he spoke. Then he took off his spectacles, laid them down, and said calmly, "God's will be done. I thank God that my boy was blameless. Better they slew him than sent him home tainted with their vices."

The certainty, such as it was, seemed like repose after the suspense. They knew to what to resign themselves, and even Lady Thistlewood's tempestuous grief had so spent itself that late in the evening the family sat round the fire in the hall, the old lord dozing as one worn out with sorrow, the others talking in hushed tones of that bright boyhood, that joyous light quenched in the night of carnage.

The butler slowly entered the hall, and approached Sir Marmaduke cautiously. "Can I speak with you, sir?"

"What is it, Davy?" demanded the lady, who first caught the words. "What did you say?"

"Madam, it is Humfrey Holt!"

Humfrey Holt was the head of the grooms who had gone with Berenger; and there was a general start and suppressed exclamation. "Humfrey Holt!" said Lord Walwyn, feebly drawing himself to sit upright, "hath he, then, escaped?"

"Yea, my Lord," said Davy, "and he brings news of my young Lord."

"Alack! Davy," said Lady Walwyn, "such news had been precious a while ago."

"Nay, so please your Ladyship, it is better than you deem. Humfrey says my young Lord is yet living."

"Living!" shrieked Lady Thistlewood, starting up. "Living! My son! and where?"

"They are bearing him home, my Lady," said the butler; "but I fear me, by what Humfrey says, that it is but in woful case."

"Bringing him home! Which way?" Philip darted off like an arrow from the bow. Sir Marmaduke hastily demanded if aid were wanted; and Lady Walwyn, interpreting the almost inaudible voice of her husband, bade that Humfrey should be called in to tell his own story.

Hands were held out in greeting, and blessings murmured, as the groom entered, looking battered and worn, and bowing low in confusion at being thus unusually conspicuous, and having to tell his story to the whole assembled family. To the first anxious question as to the condition of the young Lord, he replied, "Marry, my Lady, the life is yet in him, and that is all. He hath been shot through the head and body, and slashed about the face so as it is a shame to see. Nor hath he done aught these three weary weeks but moan from time to time so as it is enough to break one's heart to hear him; and I fear me 'tis but bringing him home to die."

"Even so, God be thanked; and you, too, honest Humfrey," said Lady Walwyn. "Let us hear when and how this deed was done."

"Why, that, my Lord, I can't so well say, being that I was not with him; more's the pity, or I'd have known the reason why, or ever they laid a finger on him. But when Master Landry, his French foster-brother, comes, he will resolve you in his own tongue. I can't parleyvoo with him, but he's an honest rogue for a Frenchman, and 'twas he brought off my young Lord. You see we were all told to be aboard the little French craft. Master Landry took me

down and settled it all with the master, a French farmer fellow that came a horse-dealing to Paris. I knew what my young Lord was after, but none of the other varlets did; and I went down and made as decent a place as I could between decks. My Lord and Master Landry were gone down to the Court meantime, and we were to lie off till we heard a whistle like a mavis on the bank, then come and take them aboard. Well, we waited and waited, and all the lights were out, and not a sound did we hear till just an hour after midnight. Then a big bell rang out, not like a decent Christianable bell, but a great clash, then another, and a lot of strokes enough to take away one's breath. Then half the windows were lighted up, and we heard shots, and screeches, and splashes, till, as I said to Jack Smithers, 'twas as if one-half the place was murthering the other. The farmer got frightened, and would have been off; but when I saw what he was at, 'No,' says I, 'not an inch do we budge without news of my Lord.' So Jack stood by the rope, and let them see that 'twas as much as their life was worth to try to unmoor. Mercy, what a night it was! Shrieks and shouts, and shots and howls, here, there, and everywhere, and splashes into the river; and by and by we saw the poor murthered creatures come floating by. The farmer, he had some words with one of the boats near, and I heard somewhat of Huguenot and Hereteek, and I knew that was what they called good Protestants. Then up comes the farmer with his sons looking mighty ugly at us, and signing that unless we let them be off 'twould be the worse for us; and we began to think as how we had best be set ashore, and go down the five of us to see if we could stand by my young Lord in some strait, or give notice to my Lord Ambassador."

"God reward you!" exclaimed Lady Walwyn.

"'Twas only our duty, my Lady," gruffly answered Humfrey; "but just as Hal had got on the quay, what should I see but Master Landry coming down the street with my young Lord on his back! I can tell you he was well-nigh spent; and just then half a dozen butcherly villains came out on him, bawling, 'Tu-y! tu-y!' which it seems means 'kill, kill.' He turned about and showed them that he had got a white sleeve and white cross in his bonnet, like them, the rascals, giving them to understand that he was only going to throw the corpse into the river. I doubted him then myself; but he caught sight of us, and in his fashion of talk with us, called out to us to help, for there was life still. So two of us took my Lord, and the other three gave the beggarly French cut-throats as good as they meant for us; while Landry shouted to the farmer to wait, and we got aboard, and made right away down the river. But never a word has the poor young gentleman spoken, though Master Landry has done all a barber or a sick-nurse could do; and he got us past the cities by showing the papers in my Lord's pocket, so that we got safe to the farmer's place. There we lay till we could get a boat to Jersey, and thence again home; and maybe my young Lord will mend now Mistress Cecily will have the handling of him."

"That is in the wisest Hands, good Humfrey," said Lord Walwyn, as the tears of feeble age flowed down his cheeks. "May He who hath brought the lad safely so far spare him yet, and raise him up. But whether he live or die, you son and daughter Thistlewood, will look that the faithfulness of Humfrey Holt and his comrades be never forgotten or unrewarded."

Humfrey again muttered something about no more than his duty; but by this time sounds were heard betokening the approach of the melancholy procession, who, having

been relieved by a relay of servants sent at once from the house, were bearing home the wounded youth. Philip first of all dashed in hurrying and stumbling. He had been unprepared by hearing Humfrey's account, and, impetuous and affectionate as he was, was entirely unrestrained, and flinging himself on his knees with the half-audible words, "Oh! Lucy! Lucy! he is as good as dead!" hid his face between his arms on his sister's lap, and sobbed with the abandonment of a child, and with all his youthful strength; so much adding to the consternation and confusion, that, finding all Lucy's gentle entreaties vain, his father at last roughly pulled up his face by main force, and said, "Philip, hold your tongue! Are we to have you on our hands as well as my Lady? I shall send you home this moment! Let your sister go."

This threat reduced the boy to silence. Lucy, who was wanted to assist in preparing Berenger's room, disengaged herself; but he remained in the same posture, his head buried on the seat of the chair, and the loud weeping only forcibly stifled by forcing his handkerchief into his mouth, as if he had been in violent bodily pain. Nor did he venture again to look up as the cause of all his distress was slowly carried into the hall, corpse-like indeed. The bearers had changed several times, all but a tall, fair Norman youth, who through the whole transit had supported the head, endeavouring to guard it from shocks. When the mother and the rest came forward, he made a gesture to conceal the face, saying in French, "Ah! mesdames; this is no sight for you."

Indeed the head and face were almost entirely hidden by bandages, and it was not till Berenger had been safely deposited on a large carved bed that the anxious relatives were permitted to perceive the number and extent of his

hurts; and truly it was only by the breath, the vital warmth, and the heavy moans when he was disturbed, or the dressings of the wounds were touched, that showed him still to be a living man. There proved to be no less than four wounds—a shot through the right shoulder, the right arm also broken with a terrible blow with a sword, a broad gash from the left temple to the right ear, and worse than all, "*le baiser d'Eustacie*," a bullet-wound where the muzzle of the pistol had absolutely been so close as to have burnt and blackened the cheek; so that his life was, as Osbert averred, chiefly owing to the assassin's jealousy of his personal beauty, which had directed his shot to the cheek rather than the head; and thus, though the bullet had terribly shattered the upper jaw and roof of the mouth, and had passed out through the back of the head, there was a hope that it had not penetrated the seat of life or reason. The other gash on the face was but a sword-wound, and though frightful to look at, was unimportant, compared with the first wound with the pistol-shot in the shoulder, with the arm broken and further injured by having served to suspend him round Osbert's neck; but it was altogether so appalling a sight, that it was no wonder that Sir Marmaduke muttered low but deep curses on the cowardly ruffians; while his wife wept in grief as violent, though more silent, than her stepson's, and only Cecily gathered the faintest ray of hope. The wounds had been well cared for, the arm had been set, the hair cut away, and lint and bandages applied with a skill that surprised her, till she remembered that Landry Osbert had been bred up in preparation to be Berenger's valet, and thus to practise those minor arts of surgery then required in a superior body-servant. For his part, though his eyes looked red, and his whole person exhausted by unceasing watching, he seemed unable to relinquish the care of his master for a moment, and her

nunnery French would not have persuaded him of her sufficiency as a nurse, had he not perceived her tender touch and ready skill. These were what made him consent to leave his post even for a short meal, and so soon as he had eaten it he was called to Lord Walwyn to supply the further account which Humfrey had been unable to give. He had waited, he explained, with a lackey, a friend of his in the palace, till he became alarmed by the influx of armed men, wearing white crosses and shirt-sleeves on their left arms, but his friend had assured him that his master had been summoned to the royal bedchamber, where he would be as safe as in church; and obtaining from Landry Osbert himself a perfectly true assurance of being a good Catholic, had supplied him with the badges that were needful for security. It was just then that Madame's maid crept down to his waiting place with the intelligence that her mistress had been bolted in, and after a short consultation they agreed to go and see whether M. le Baron were indeed waiting, and, if he were, to warn him of the suspicious state of the lower regions of the palace.

They were just in time to see, but not to prevent the attack upon their young master; and while Véronique fled, screaming, Landry Osbert, who had been thrown back on the stairs in her sudden flight, recovered himself and hastened to his master. The murderers, after their blows had been struck, had hurried along the corridor to join the body of assassins, whose work they had in effect somewhat anticipated. Landry, full of rage and despair, was resolved at least to save his foster-brother's corpse from further insult, and bore it downstairs in his arms. On the way, he perceived that life was not yet extinct, and resolving to become doubly cautious, he sought in the pocket for the purse that had been well filled for the flight, and by the persuasive

argument of gold crowns, obtained egress from the door-keeper of the postern, where Berenger hoped to have emerged in a far different manner. It was a favourable moment, for the main body of the murderers were at that time being posted in the court by the captain of the guard, ready to massacre the gentlemen of the King of Navarre's suite, and he was therefore unmolested by any claimant of the plunder of the apparent corpse he bore on his shoulders. The citizens of Paris who had been engaged in their share of the murders for more than an hour before the tragedy began in the Louvre, frequently beset him on his way to the quay, and but for the timely aid of his English comrades, he would hardly have brought off his foster-brother safely.

The pass with which King Charles had provided Berenger for himself and his followers when his elopement was first planned, enabled Osbert to carry his whole crew safely past all the stations where passports were demanded. He had much wished to procure surgical aid at Rouen, but learning from the boatmen on the river that the like bloody scenes were there being enacted, he had decided on going on to his master's English home as soon as possible, merely trusting to his own skill by the way; and though it was the slightest possible hope, yet the healthy state of the wounds, and the mere fact of life continuing, had given him some faint trust that there might be a partial recovery.

Lord Walwyn repeated his agitated thanks and praises for such devotion to his grandson.

Osbert bowed, laid his hand on his heart, and replied—"Monseigneur is good, but what say I? Monsieur le Baron is my foster-brother! Say that, and all is said in one word."

He was then dismissed, with orders to take some rest, but he obstinately refused all commands in French or English to go to bed, and was found some time after fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

SWEET HEART.

"Ye hae marred a bonnier face than your ain."
Dying Words of the Bonnie Earl of Moray.

One room at Hurst Walwyn, though large, wainscoted, and well furnished, bore as pertinaciously the air of a cell as the appearance of Sister Cecily St. John continued like that of a nun. There was a large sunny oriel, in which a thrush sang merrily in a wicker cage; and yet the very central point and leading feature of the room was the altar-like table, covered with rich needlework, with a carved ebony crucifix placed on it, and on the wall above, quaint and stiff, but lovely-featured, delicately tinted pictures of Our Lady in the centre, and of St. Anne and St. Cecilia on either side, with skies behind of most ethereal blue, and robes tenderly trimmed with gold. A little shrine of purple spar, with a crystal front, contained a fragment of sacred bone; a silver shell held holy water, perpetuated from some blessed by Bishop Ridley.

"With velvet bound and broidered o'er,
Her breviary book"

lay open at "Sext," and there, too, lay with its three marks at the Daily Lessons, the Bishop's Bible, and the Common Prayer beside it.

The elder Baron de Ribaumont had never pardoned Cecily his single glance at that table, and had seriously remonstrated with his father-in-law for permitting its existence, quoting Rachel, Achan, and Maachah. Yet he never knew of the hair-cloth smock, the discipline, the cord and sack-cloth that lay stored in the large carved awmry, and were secretly in use on every fast or vigil, not with any notion of merit, but of simple obedience, and with even deeper comprehension and enjoyment of their spiritual significance, of which, in her cloister life, she had comprehended little.

It was not she, however, who knelt with bowed head and clasped hands before the altar-table, the winter sunbeams making the shadows of the ivy sprays dance upon the deep mourning dress and pale cheek. The eyelashes were heavy with tear-drops, and veiled eyes that had not yet attained to the region of calm, like the light quivering of the lips showed that here was the beginning of the course of trial through which serenity might be won, and for ever.

By and by the latch was raised, and Cecily came forward. Lucy rose quickly to her feet, and while giving and returning a fond embrace, asked with her eyes the question that Cecily answered, "Still in the same lethargy. The only shade of sense that I have seen is an unclosing of the eyes, a wistful look whenever the door opened, and a shiver through all his frame whenever the great bell rings, till my Lord forbade it to be sounded."

"That frightful bell that the men told us of," said Lucy, shuddering; "oh, what a heart that murderess must have had!"

"Hold, Lucy! How should we judge her, who may at this moment be weeping in desolation?"

Lucy looked up astonished. "Aunt," she said, "you

have been so long shut up with him that you hardly can have heard all—how she played fast and loose, and for the sake of a mere pageant put off the flight from the time when it would have been secure even until that dreadful eve!"

"I know it," said Cecily. "I fear me much that her sin has been great; yet, Lucy, it were better to pray for her than to talk wildly against her."

"Alas!" murmured Lucy, "I could bear it and glory in it when it seemed death for the faith's sake, but," and the tears burst out, "to find he was only trapped and slain for the sake of a faithless girl—and that he should love her still."

"She is his wife," said Cecily. "Child, from my soul I grieve for you, but none the less must I, if no other will, keep before your eyes that our Berenger's faith belongs solely to her."

"You—you never would have let me forget it," said Lucy. "Indeed I am more maidenly when not alone with you! I know verily that he is loyal, and that my hatred to her is more than is meet. I will—I will pray for her, but I would that you were in your convent still, and that I could hide me there."

"That were scarce enough," said Cecily. "One sister we had who had fled to our house to hide her grief when her betrothed had wedded another. She took her sorrows for her vocation, strove to hurry on her vows, and when they were taken, she chafed and fretted under them. It was she who wrote to the commissioner the letter that led to the visitation of our house, and, moreover, she was the only one of us who married."

"To her own lover?"

"No, to a brewer at Winchester! I say not that you could ever be like poor sister Bridget, but only that the

cloister has no charm to still the heart—Prayer and duty can do as much without as within."

"When we deemed her worthy, I was glad of his happiness," said Lucy, thoughtfully.

"You did, my dear, and I rejoiced—Think now how grievous it must be with her, if she, as I fear she may, yielded her heart to those, who told her that to ensnare him was her duty, or, if indeed she were as much deceived as he."

"Then she will soon be comforted," said Lucy, still with some bitterness in her voice; bitterness of which she herself was perhaps conscious, for suddenly dropping on her knees, she hid her face, and cried, "Oh help me to pray for her, Aunt Cecily, and that I may do her wrong no more!"

And Cecily, in her low conventual chant, sang, almost under her breath, the noonday Latin hymn, the words of which, long familiar to Lucy, had never as yet so come home to her.

"Quench Thou the fires of heat and strife,
The wasting fever of the heart;
From perils guard our feeble life,
And to our souls Thy help impart."

Cecily's judgment would have been thought weakly charitable by all the rest of the family. Mr. Adderley had been forwarded by Sir Francis Walsingham like a bale of goods, and arriving in a mood of such self-reproach as would be deemed abject, by persons used to the modern relations between noblemen and their chaplains, was exhilarated by the unlooked-for comfort of finding his young charge at least living, and in his grandfather's house. From his narrative, Walsingham's letters, and Osbert's account, Lord Walwyn saw no reason to doubt that the Black Ribaumonts had thought the massacre a favourable moment for sweeping

the only survivor of the White or elder branch away, and that not only had royalty lent itself to the cruel project, but that as Diane de Ribaumont had failed as a bait, the young espoused wife had herself been employed to draw him into the snare, and secure his presence at the slaughter-house, away from his safe asylum at the Ambassador's, or even in the King's garde-robe. It was an unspeakably frightful view to take of the case, yet scarcely worse than the reality of many of the dealings of those with whom the poor young girl had been associated: certainly not worse than the crimes, the suspicion of which was resting on the last dowager Queen of France; and all that could be fel by the sorrowing family, was comfort, that at least corruption of mind had either not been part of the game, or had been unsuccessful, and, by all testimony, the victim was still the same innocent boy. This was all their relief, while for days, for weeks, Berenger de Ribaumont lay in a trance or torpor between life and death. Sometimes, as Cecily had said, his eyes turned with a startled wistfulness towards the door, and the sound of a bell seemed to thrill him with a start of agony; but for the most part he neither appeared to see or hear, and a few moans were the only sounds that escaped him. The Queen, in her affection for her old friend, and her strong feeling for the victims of the massacre, sent down the court physician, who turned him about, and elicited sundry heavy groans, but could do no more than enjoin patient waiting on the beneficent powers of nature in early youth. His visit produced one benefit, namely, the strengthening of Cecily St. John's hands against the charms, elixirs, and nostrums with which Lady Thistlewood's friends supplied her,—plasters from the cunning women of Lyme Regis, made of powder of giants' bones, and snakes prayed into stone by St. Aldhelm, pills of live woodlice, and fomentations

of living earthworms and spiders. Great was the censure incurred by Lady Walwyn for refusing to let such remedies be tried on *her* grandson. And he was so much more her child than his mother's, that Dame Annora durst do no more than maunder.

In this perfect rest, it seemed as if after a time "the powers of nature" did begin to rally, there were appearances of healing about the wounds, the difference between sleeping and waking became more evident, the eyes lost the painful, half-closed, vacant look, but were either shut or opened with languid recognition. The injuries were such as to exclude him from almost every means of expression, the wound in his mouth made speech impossible, and his right arm was not available for signs. It was only the clearness of his eyes, and their response to what was said, that showed that his mind was recovering tone, and then he seemed only alive to the present, and to perceive nothing but what related to his suffering and its alleviations. The wistfulness that had shown itself at first was gone, and even when he improved enough to establish a language of signs with eye, lip, or left hand, Cecily became convinced that he had little or no memory of recent occurrences, and that finding himself at home among familiar faces, his still dormant perceptions demanded no further explanation.

This blank was the most favourable state for his peace and for his recovery, and it was of long duration, lasting even till he had made so much progress that he could leave his bed, and even speak a few words, though his weakness was much prolonged by the great difficulty with which he could take nourishment. About two winters before, Cecily had successfully nursed him through a severe attack of small-pox, and she thought that he confounded his present state with the former illness, when he had had nearly the same attendants

and surroundings as at present; and that his faculties were not yet roused enough to perceive the incongruity.

Once or twice he showed surprise at visits from his mother or Philip, who had then been entirely kept away from him, and about Christmas he brightened so much, and awoke to things about him so much more fully, that Cecily thought the time of recollection could not be much longer deferred. Any noise, however, seemed so painful to him, that the Christmas festivities were held at Combe Manor instead of Hurst Walwyn; only after church, Sir Marmaduke and Lady Thistlewood came in to make him a visit, as he sat in a large easy-chair by his bedroom-fire, resting after having gone through as much of the rites of the day as he was able for, with Mr. Adderley. The room looked very cheerful with the bright wood-fire on the open hearth, shining on the gay tapestry hangings, and the dark wood of the carved bed. The evergreen-decked window shimmered with sunshine, and even the patient, leaning back among crimson cushions, though his face and head were ghastly enough wherever they were not covered with patches and bandages, still had a pleasant smile with lip and eye to thank his stepfather for his cheery wishes of "a merry Christmas, at least one better in health."

"I did not bring the little wenches, Berenger, lest they should weary you," said his mother.

Berenger looked alarmed, and said with the indistinctness with which he always spoke, "Have they caught it? Are they marked?"

"No, no, not like you, my boy," said Sir Marmaduke, sufficiently aware of Berenger's belief to be glad to keep it up, and yet obliged to walk to the window to hide his diversion at the notion of his little girls catching the contagion of sword gashes and bullet-wounds. Dame Annora prattled on, "But they have sent you their Christmas gifts by me, poor

children, they have long been busied with them, and I fancy Lucy did half herself. See this kerchief is hemmed by little Dolly, and here are a pair of bands and cuffs to match, that Nanny and Bessy have been broidering with their choicest stitchery."

Berenger smiled, took, expressed admiration by gesture, and then said in a dreamy, uncertain manner, "Methought I had some gifts for them;" then looking round the room, his eye fell on a small brass-bound casket which had travelled with him to hold his valuables; he pointed to it with a pleased look, as Sir Marmaduke lifted it and placed it on a chair by his side. The key, a small ornamental brass one, was in his purse, not far off, and Lady Thistlewood was full of exceeding satisfaction at the unpacking not only of foreign gifts, but as she hoped, of the pearls; Cecily meantime stole quietly in, to watch that her patient was not over-wearied.

He was resuming the use of his right arm, though it was still weak and stiff, and he evidently had an instinct against letting any one deal with that box but himself; he tried himself to unlock it, and though forced to leave this to Sir Marmaduke, still leant over it when opened, as if to prevent his mother's curious glances from penetrating its recesses, and allowed no hands near it but his own. He first brought out a pretty feather fan, saying as he held it to his mother; "For Nan, I promised it. It was bought at the Halles," he added, more dreamily.

Then again he dived, and brought out a wax medallion of Our Lady guarded by angels, and made the sign that always brought Cecily to him. He held it up to her with a puzzled smile, saying, "They thought me a mere Papist for buying it—M. de Teligny, I think it was."

They had heard how the good and beloved Teligny had been shot down on the roof of his father-in-law's house, by

rabid assassins, strangers to his person, when all who knew him had spared him, from love to his gentle nature; and the name gave a strange thrill.

He muttered something about "Pedlar,—Montpipeau,"—and still continued. Then came a small silver casket, diffusing an odour of attar of roses—he leant back in his chair—and his mother would have taken it from him, supposing him overcome by the scent, but he held it fast and shook his head, saying, "For Lucy,—but she must give it herself. She gave up any gift for herself for it—she said we needed no love-tokens." And he closed his eyes. Dame Annora plunged into the unpacking, and brought out a pocket-mirror with enamelled cupids in the corners, addressed to herself; and then came upon Berenger's own.

Again came a fringed pair of gloves among the personal jewellery such as gentlemen were wont to wear, the rings, clasps and brooches he had carried from home. Dame Annora's impatience at last found vent in the exclamation, "The pearls, son; I do not see the chaplet of pearls."

"She had them," answered Berenger, in a matter-of-fact tone, "to wear at the masque."

"She——"

Sir Marmaduke's great hand choked, as it were, the query on his wife's lips, unseen by her son, who, as if the words had touched some chord, was more eagerly seeking in the box, and presently drew out a bow of carnation ribbon with a small piece of paper full of pin-holes attached to it. At once he carried it to his lips, kissed it fervently, and then, sinking back in his chair, seemed to be trying to gather up the memory that had prompted the impulse, knitted his brows together, and then suddenly exclaimed, "Where is she?"

His mother tried the last antecedent. "Lucy? she shall come and thank you to-morrow."

He shook his head with a vehement negative, beckoned Cecily impatiently, and said earnestly, "Is it the contagion? Is she sick? I will go to her."

Cecily and Sir Marmaduke both replied with a "No, no!" and were thankful, though in much suspense at the momentary pause, while again he leant back on the cushions, looked steadily at the pin-holes, that formed themselves into the word "Sweet heart," then suddenly began to draw up the loose sleeve of his wrapping-gown, and unbutton the wrist-band of his right sleeve. His mother tried to help him, asking if he had hurt or tired his arm. They would have been almost glad to hear that it was so, but he shook her off impatiently, and the next moment had a view of the freshly skinned over, but still wide and gaping gash on his arm. He looked for a brief space, and said, "It is a sword-cut."

"Truly it is, lad," said Sir Marmaduke, "and a very bad one, happily whole! Is this the first time you have seen it?"

He did not answer, but covered his eyes with his hand, and presently burst out again, "Then it is no dream? Sir—Have I been to France?"

"Yes, my son, you have," said Sir Marmaduke, gently, and with more tenderness than could have been looked for; "but what passed there is much better viewed as a dream, and cast behind your back."

Berenger had, while he spoke, taken up the same little mirror where he had once admired himself; and as he beheld the scar and plaster that disfigured his face, with a fresh start of recollection, muttered over, "'*Barbouiller ce chien de visage*'—ay,' so he said. I felt the pistol's muzzle touch! Narcisse! Has God had mercy on me? I prayed Him. Ah! '*le baiser d'Eustacie*'—so he said. I was waiting in the

dark. Why did he come instead of her? Oh! father, where is she?"

It was a sore task, but Sir Marmaduke went bravely and bluntly, though far from unkindly, to the point: "She remains with her friends in France."

There the youth's look of utter horror and misery shocked and startled them all, and he groaned rather than said, "Left there! Left to them! What have I done to leave her there?"

"Come, Berenger, this will not serve," said his mother, trying to rouse and cheer him. "You should rather be thankful that when you had been so foully ensnared by their wiles, good Osbert brought you off with your life away from those bloody doings. Yes, you may thank Heaven and Osbert, for you are the only one of them living now."

"Of whom, mother?"

"Of all the poor Protestants that like you were deluded by the pack of murderers over there. What,"—fancying it would exhilarate him to hear of his own escape—"you knew not that the bloody Guise and the Paris cut-throats rose and slew every Huguenot they could lay hands on? Why, did not the false wench put off your foolish runaway project for the very purpose of getting you into the trap on the night of the massacre?"

He looked with a piteous, appealing glance from her to Cecily and Sir Marmaduke, as if in hopes that they would contradict.

"Too true, my lad," said Sir Marmaduke. "It is Heaven's good mercy that Osbert carried you out alive. No other Protestant left the palace alive but the King of Navarre and his cousin, who turned renegades."

"And she is left there?" he repeated.

"Heed her not, my dear boy," began his mother; "you are safe, and must forget her ill-faith and——"

Berenger seemed scarcely to hear this speech—he held out his hands as if stunned and dizzied, and only said, or rather indicated, "Let me lie down."

His stepfather almost carried him across the room, and laid him on his bed, where he turned away from the light and shut his eyes; but the knot of ribbon and the pin-pricked word was still in his hand, and his mother longed to take away the token of this false love, as she believed it. The great clock struck the hour for her to go. "Leave him quiet," said Cecily, gently; "he can bear no more now. I will send over in the evening to let you know how he fares."

"But that he should be so set on the little bloodthirsty baggage," sighed Lady Thistlewood; and then going up to her son, she poured out her explanation of being unable to stay, as her parents were already at the Manor, with no better entertainers than Lucy, Philip, and the children. She thanked him for the gifts, which she would take to them with his love. All this passed by him as though he heard it not, but when leaning down, she kissed his forehead, and at the same time tried to withdraw the knot of ribbon; his fingers closed on it with a grasp like steel, so cold were they, yet so fast.

Sir Marmaduke lingered a few moments behind her, and Berenger opening his eyes, as if to see whether solitude had been achieved, found the kind-hearted knight gazing at him with eyes full of tears. "Berry, my lad," he said, "bear it like a man. I know how hard it is. There's not a woman of them all that an honest, plain Englishman has a chance with, when a smooth-tongued Frenchman comes round her! But a man may live a true and honest life however sore his heart may be, and God Almighty makes it up to him if he faces it out manfully."

Good Sir Marmaduke in his sympathy had utterly for-

gotten both Berenger's French blood, and that he was the son of the very smooth-tongued interloper who had robbed his life of its first bloom. Berenger was altogether unequal to do more than murmur, as he held out his hand in response to the kindness, "You do not know her."

"Ah! poor lad." Sir Marmaduke shook his head and left him to Cecily.

After the first shock, Berenger never rested till he had made Osbert, Mr. Adderley, and Cecily tell him all they knew, and asked by name after those whom he had known best at Paris. Alas! of all those, save such as had been in the Ambassador's house, there was but one account to give. Venerable warrior, noble-hearted youth, devoted pastor, all alike had perished!

This frightful part of the story was altogether new to him. He had been probably the earliest victim in the Louvre, as being the special object of private malice, which had contrived to involve him in the general catastrophe; and his own recollections carried him only to the flitting of lights and ringing of bells, that had made him imagine that an alarm of fire would afford a good opportunity of escape if *she* would but come. A cloaked figure had approached,—he had held out his arms—met that deadly stroke—heard the words hissed in his ear.

He owned that for some time past strange recollections had been flitting through his mind—a perpetual unsatisfied longing for and expectation of his wife, and confused impressions of scenes and people that harassed him perpetually, even when he could not discern between dreams and reality; but knowing that he had been very ill, he had endeavoured to account for everything as delirious fancies, but had become increasingly distressed by their vividness, confusion, and want of outward confirmation. At last these solid tokens

and pledges from that time had brought certainty back, and with it the harmony and clearness of his memory: and the strong affection, that even his oblivion had not extinguished, now recurred in all its warmth to its object.

Four months had passed, as he now discovered, since that night when he had hoped to have met Eustacie, and she must be believing him dead. His first measure on the following day when he had been dressed and seated in his chair was to send for his casket, and with his slow stiff arm write thus:—

"Mon Cœur, my own Sweetheart,—Hast thou thought me dead, and thyself deserted? Osbert will tell thee all, and why I can scarce write. Trust thyself to him to bring to me. I shall be whole seeing thee. Or if thou canst not come with him, write or send me the least token by him, and I will come and bear thee home so soon as I can put foot in stirrup. Would that I could write all that is in my heart!

"Thy Husband."

It was all that either head or hand would enable him to say, but he had the fullest confidence in Landry Osbert, who was one of the few who understood him at half a word. He desired Osbert to seek the lady out wherever she might be, whether still at court or in a convent, convey the letter to her if possible, and, if she could by any means escape, obtain from Château Leurre such an escort as she could come to England with. If, as was too much to be feared, she was under too close restraint, Osbert should send intelligence home, as he could readily do through the Ambassador's household, and Berenger trusted by that time to be able to take measures for claiming her in person.

Osbert readily undertook everything, but supplies for his journey were needed, and there was an absolute commotion

in the house when it was known that Berenger had been writing to his faithless spouse, and wishing to send for her. Lord Walwyn came up to visit his grandson, and explain to him with much pity and consideration that he considered such a step as vain, and only likely to lead to further insult. Berenger's respect forced him to listen without interruption, and though he panted to answer, it was a matter of much difficulty, for the old lord was becoming deaf, and could not catch the indistinct, agitated words—

"My Lord, she is innocent as day."

"Ah! Amen, boy."

"I pledge my life on her love and innocence."

"Love! yes, my poor boy; but if she be unworthy? Eh? Cecily, what says he?"

"He is sure of her innocence, sir."

"That is of course. But, my dear lad, you will soon learn that even a gentle, good woman who has a conscience-keeper, is too apt to think her very sense of right ought to be sacrificed to what she calls her religion.—What is it, what is he telling you, Cecily?"

"She was ready to be one of us," Berenger said, with a great effort to make it clear.

"Ah, a further snare. Poor child! The very softest of them become the worst deceivers, and the kindred who have had the charge of her all their life could no doubt bend her will."

"Sir," said Berenger, finding argument impossible, "if you will but let me despatch Osbert, her answer will prove to you what she is."

"There is something in that," said Lord Walwyn, when he had heard it repeated by Cecily. "It is, of course, needful that both she and her relations should be aware of Berenger's life, and I trow nothing but the reply will convince him."

"Convince him!" muttered Berenger. "Oh that I could make him understand. What a wretch I am to have no voice to defend her!"

"What?" said the old lord again.

"Only that I could speak, sir; you should know why it is sacrilege to doubt her."

"Ah! well, we will not wound you, my son, while talk is vain. You shall have the means of sending your groom, if thus you will set your mind at rest, though I had rather have trusted to Walsingham's dealing. I will myself give him a letter to Sir Francis, to forward him on his way; and should the young lady prove willing to hold to her contract and come to you here, I will pray him to do everything to aid her that may be consistent with his duty in his post."

This was a great and wonderful concession for Lord Walwyn, and Berenger was forced to be contented with it, though it galled him terribly to have Eustacie distrusted, and be unable to make his vindication even heard or understood, as well as to be forced to leave her rescue, and even his own explanation to her, to a mere servant.

This revival of his memory had not at all conduced to his progress in recovery. His brain was in no state for excitement or agitation, and pain and confusion were the consequence, and were counteracted, after the practice of the time, by profuse bleedings, which prolonged his weakness. The splintered state of the jaw and roof of the mouth likewise produced effects that made him suffer severely, and deprived him at times even of the small power of speech that he usually possessed; and though he had set his heart upon being able to start for Paris so soon as Osbert's answer should arrive, each little imprudence he committed, in order to convince himself of his progress, threw him back so seriously, that he was barely able to walk downstairs to

the hall, and sit watching—watching, so that it was piteous to see him—the gates of the courtyard, by the time that, on a cold March day, a booted and spurred courier (not Osbert) entered by them.

He sprang up, and faster than he had yet attempted to move, met the man in the hall, and demanded the packet. It was a large one, done up in canvas, and addressed to the Right Honourable and Worshipful Sir William, Baron Walwyn of Hurst Walwyn, and he had further to endure the delay of carrying it to his grandfather's library, which he entered with far less delay and ceremony than was his wont. "Sit down, Berenger," said the old man, while addressing himself to the fastenings; and the permission was needed, for he could hardly have stood another minute. The covering contained a letter to Lord Walwyn himself, and a packet addressed to the Baron de Ribaumont, which his trembling fingers could scarcely succeed in cutting and tearing open.

How shall it be told what the contents of the packet were? Lord Walwyn reading on with much concern, but little surprise, was nevertheless startled by the fierce shout with which Berenger broke out:

"A lie! a lie forged in hell!" And then seizing the parchment, was about to rend it with all the force of passion, when his grandfather, seizing his hand, said, in his calm, authoritative voice, "Patience, my poor son."

"How, how should I have patience when they send me such poisoned lies as these of my wife, and she is in the power of the villains. Grandfather, I must go instantly——"

"Let me know what you have heard," said Lord Walwyn, holding him feebly indeed, but with all the impressive power and gravity of his years.

"Falsehoods," said Berenger, pushing the whole mass of

papers over to him, and then hiding his head between his arms on the table.

Lord Walwyn finished his own letter first. Walsingham wrote with much kind compassion, but quite decisively. He had no doubt that the Ribaumont family had acted as one wheel in the great plot that had destroyed all the heads of Protestant families and swept away among others, as they had hoped, the only scion of the rival house. The old Chevalier de Ribaumont had, he said, begun by expressing sorrow for the mischance that had exposed his brave young cousin to be lost in the general catastrophe, and he had professed proportionate satisfaction on hearing of the young man's safety. But the Ambassador believed him to have been privy to his son's designs; and whether Mdlle. de Nid-de-Merle herself had been a willing agent or not, she certainly had remained in the hands of the family. The decree annulling the marriage had been published, the lady was in a convent in Anjou, and Narcisse de Ribaumont had just been permitted to assume the title of Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, and was gone into Anjou to espouse her. Sir Francis added a message of commiseration for the young Baron, but could not help congratulating his old friend on having his grandson safe and free from these inconvenient ties.

Berenger's own packet contained, in the first place, a copy of the cassation of the marriage, on the ground of its having been contracted when the parties were of too tender age to give their legal consent, and its having been unsatisfied since they had reached ecclesiastical years for lawful contraction of wedlock.

The second was one of the old Chevalier's polite productions. He was perfectly able to ignore Berenger's revocation of his application for the separation, since the first letter had remained unanswered, and the King's peremptory

commands had prevented Berenger from taking any open measures after his return from Montpipeau. Thus the old gentleman, after expressing due rejoicing at his dear young cousin's recovery, and regret at the unfortunate mischance that had led to his being confounded with the many suspected Huguenots, proceeded as if matters stood exactly as they had been before the pall-mall party, and as if the decree that he inclosed were obtained in accordance with the young Baron's intentions. He had caused it to be duly registered, and both parties were at liberty to enter upon other contracts of matrimony. The further arrangements which Berenger had undertaken to sell his lands in Normandy, and his claim on the ancestral castle in Picardy, should be carried out, and deeds sent for his signature so soon as he should be of age. In the meantime, the Chevalier courteously imparted to his fair cousin the marriage of his daughter, Mademoiselle Diane de Ribaumont with M. le Comte de Selinville, which had taken place on the last St. Martin's day, and of his niece, Mademoiselle Eustacie de Ribaumont de Nid-de-Merle with his son, who had received permission to take her father's title of Marquis de Nid-de-Merle. The wedding was to take place at Bellaise before the end of the Carnival, and would be concluded before this letter came to hand.

Lastly, there was an ill written and spelt letter, running somewhat thus—

"Monseigneur,—Your faithful servant hopes that Monsieur le Baron will forgive him for not returning, since I have been assured by good priests that it is not possible to save my soul in a country of heretics. I have done everything as Monsieur commanded, I have gone down into Anjou, and have had the honour to see the young lady to whom Monsieur le Baron charged me with a commission, and I delivered to

her his letter, whereupon the lady replied that she thanked M. le Baron for the honour he had done her, but that being on the point of marriage to M. le Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, she did not deem it fitting to write to him, nor had she any tokens to send him, save what he had received on the St. Barthélemy midnight; they might further his suit elsewhere. These, Monsieur, were her words, and she laughed as she said them, so gaily that I thought her fairer than ever. I have prevailed with her to take me into her service as intendant of the Château de Nid-de-Merle, knowing as she does, my fidelity to the name of Ribaumont. And so, trusting Monseigneur will pardon me for what I do solely for the good of my soul, I will ever pray for his welfare, and remain,

"His faithful menial and valet,

"Landry Osbert."

The result was only what Lord Walwyn had anticipated, but he was nevertheless shocked at the crushing weight of the blow. His heart was full of compassion for the youth so cruelly treated in these his first years of life, and as much torn in his affections as mangled in person. After a pause, while he gathered up the sense of the letters, he laid his hand kindly on his grandson's arm, and said, "This is a woful budget, my poor son; we will do our best to help you bear it."

"The only way to bear it," said Berenger, lifting up his face, "is for me to take horse and make for Anjou instantly. She will hold out bravely, and I may yet save her."

"Madness," said his grandfather; "you have then not read your fellow's letter."

"I read no letter from fellow of mine. Yonder is a vile forgery. Narcisse's own, most likely. No one else would

have so profaned her as to put such words into her mouth! My dear faithful foster-brother — have they murdered him?"

"Can you point to any proof that it is forged?" said Lord Walwyn, aware that handwriting was too difficult an art, and far too crabbed, among persons of Osbert's class, for there to be any individuality of penmanship.

"It is all forged," said Berenger. "It is as false that she could frame such a message as that poor Osbert would leave me."

"These priests have much power over the conscience," began Lord Walwyn; but Berenger, interrupting his grandfather for the first time in his life, cried, "No priest could change her whole nature. Oh! my wife! my darling! what may they not be inflicting on her now! Sir, I must go. She may be saved! The deadly sin may be prevented!"

"This is mere raving, Berenger," said Lord Walwyn, not catching half what he said, and understanding little more than his resolution to hasten in quest of the lady. "You who have not mounted a horse, nor walked across the pleasaunce yet!"

"My limbs should serve me to rescue her, or they are worth nothing to me."

Lord Walwyn would have argued that he need not regret his incapacity to move, since it was no doubt already too late, but Berenger burst forth—"She will resist; she will resist to the utmost, even if she deems me dead. Tortures will not shake her when she knows I live. I must prepare." And he started to his feet.

"Grandson," said Lord Walwyn, laying a hand on his arm, "listen to me. You are in no state to judge for yourself. I therefore command you to desist from this mad purpose."

He spoke gravely, but Berenger was disobedient for the

first time. "My Lord," he said, "you are but my grandfather. She is my wife. My duty is to her."

He had plucked his sleeve away and was gone, before Lord Walwyn had been able to reason with him that there was no wife in the case, a conclusion at which the old statesman would not have arrived had he known of the ceremony at Montpipeau, and all that had there passed; but not only did Berenger deem himself bound to respect the King's secret, but conversation was so difficult to him that he had told very little of his adventures, and less to Lord Walwyn than any one else. In effect, his grandfather considered this resolution of going to France as mere frenzy, and so it almost was, not only on the score of health and danger, but because as a ward, he was still so entirely under subjection, that his journey could have been hindered by absolutely forcible detention; and to this Lord Walwyn intended to resort, unless the poor youth either came to a more rational mind, or became absolutely unable to travel.

The last—as he had apprehended—came to pass only too surely. The very attempt to argue, and to defend Eustacie was too much for the injured head; and long before night Berenger fully believed himself on the journey, acted over its incidents, and struggled wildly with difficulties, all the time lying on his bed, with the old servants holding him down, and Cecily listening tearfully to his ravings.

For weeks longer he was to lie there in greater danger than ever. He only seemed soothed into quiet when Cecily chanted those old Latin hymns of her Benedictine rule, and then—when he could speak at all—he showed himself to be in imagination praying in Eustacie's convent chapel, sure to speak to her when the service should be over.

CHAPTER XV.

NOTRE-DAME DE BELLAISE.[1]

"There came a man by middle day,
He spied his sport and went away,
And brought the king that very night,
And brake my bower and slew my knight."
The Border Widow's Lament.

That same Latin hymn which Cecily St. John daily chanted in her own chamber was due from the choir of Cistercian sisters in the chapel of the Convent of our Lady at Bellaise, in the Bocage of Anjou; but there was a convenient practice of lumping together the entire night and forenoon hours at nine o'clock in the morning, and all the evening ones at Compline, so that the sisters might have undisturbed sleep at night and entertainment by day. Bellaise was a very comfortable little nunnery, which only received richly dowered inmates, and was therefore able to maintain them in much ease, though without giving occasion to a breath of scandal. Founded by a daughter of the first Angevin Ribaumont, it had become a sort of appanage for the superfluous daughters of the house, and nothing would more have amazed its present head, Eustacie Barbe de Ribaumont,—conventually known as La

[1] Bellaise is not meant for a type of all nunneries, but of the condition to which many of the lesser ones had come before the general reaction and purification of the seventeenth century.

Mère Marie Séraphine de St.-Louis, and to the world as Madame de Bellaise,—than to be accused of not fulfilling the intentions of the Bienheureuse Barbe, the foundress, or of her patron St. Bernard.

Madame de Bellaise was a fine-looking woman of forty, in a high state of preservation, owing to the healthy life she had led. Her eyes were of brilliant, beautiful black, her complexion had a glow, her hair—for she wore it visibly—formed crisp rolls of jetty ringlets on her temples, almost hiding her close white cap. The heavy thick veil was tucked back beneath the furred purple silk hood that fastened under her chin. The white robes of her order were not of serge, but of the finest cloth, and were almost hidden by a short purple cloak with sleeves, likewise lined and edged with fur, and fastened on the bosom with a gold brooch. Her fingers, bearing more rings than the signet of her house, were concealed in embroidered gauntlets of Spanish leather. One of them held an ivory-handled riding-rod, the other the reins of the well-fed jennet, on which the lady, on a fine afternoon late in the Carnival, was cantering home through the lanes of the Bocage, after a successful morning's hawking among the wheat ears. She was attended by a pair of sisters, arrayed somewhat in the same style, and by a pair of mounted grooms, the falconer with his charge having gone home by a footway.

The sound of horses' feet approaching made her look towards a long lane that came down at right angles to that along which she was riding, and slacken her pace before coming to its opening. And as she arrived at the intersection, she beheld advancing, mounted on a little rough pony, the spare figure of her brother the Chevalier, in his home suit, so greasy and frayed, that only his plumed hat (and a rusty plume it was) and the old sword at his side showed his high degree.

He waved his hand to her as a sign to halt, and rode quickly up, scarcely giving time for a greeting ere he said, "Sister, the little one is not out with you."

"No, truly, the little mad thing, she is stricter and more headstrong than ever was her preceptress. Poor Monique! I had hoped that we should be at rest when that *casse-tête* had carried off her scruples to Ste.-Claire, at Luçon, but here is this little droll far beyond her, without being even a nun!"

"Assuredly not. The business must be concluded at once. She must be married before Lent."

"That will scarce be—in her present frame."

"It must be. Listen, sister. Here is this miserable alive!"

"Her spouse!"

"Folly about her spouse! The decree from Rome has annulled the foolish mummery of her infancy. It came a week after the Protestant conspiracy, and was registered when the Norman peasants at Château Leurre showed contumacy. It was well; for, behold, our gallant is among his English friends, recovering, and even writing a billet. Anon he will be upon our hands in person. By the best fortune, Gillot fell in with his messenger this morning, prowling about on his way to the convent, and brought him to me to be examined. I laid him fast in ward, and sent Gillot off to ride day and night to bring my son down to secure the girl at once."

"You will never obtain her consent. She is distractedly in love with his memory! Let her guess at his life, and——"

"Precisely. Therefore must we be speedy. All Paris knows it by this time, for the fellow went straight to the English Ambassador; and I trust my son has been wise

enough to set off already; for should we wait till after Lent, Monsieur le Baron himself might be upon us."

"Poor child! You men little heed how you make a woman suffer."

"How, Reverend Mother! you pleading for a heretic marriage, that would give our rights to a Huguenot—what say I?—an English renegade!"

"I plead not, brother. The injustice towards you must be repaired; but I have a certain love for my niece, and I fear she will be heartbroken when she learns the truth, the poor child."

"Bah! The Abbess should rejoice in thus saving her soul! How if her heretic treated Bellaise like the convents of England?"

"No threats, brother. As a daughter of Ribaumont and a mother of the Church will I stand by you," said the Abbess with dignity.

"And now tell me how it has been with the child. I have not seen her since we agreed that the request did but aggravate her. You said her health was better since her nurse had been so often with her, and that she had ceased from her austerities."

"Not entirely; for when first she came, in her transports of despair and grief on finding Sœur Monique removed, she extorted from Father Bonami a sort of hope that she might yet save her husband's, I mean the Baron's, soul. Then, truly, it was a frenzy of fasts and prayers. Father Bonami has made his profit, and so have the fathers of Chollet—all her money has gone in masses, and in alms to purchase the prayers of the poor, and she herself fasting on bread and water, kneeling barefooted in the chapel till she was transfixed with cold. No *chaufferette*, not she! Obstinate to the last degree! Tell her she would die—it was the best news

one could bring; all her desire, to be in a more rigid house with Sœur Monique at Luçon. At length, Mère Perrine and Véronique found her actually fainting and powerless with cold on the chapel-floor; and since that time she has been more reasonable. There are prayers as much as ever; but the fancy to kill herself with fasting has passed. She begins to recover her looks, nay, sometimes I have thought she had an air of hope in her eyes and lips; but what know I? I have much to occupy me, and she persists in shutting herself up with her woman."

"You have not allowed her any communication from without?"

"Mère Perrine has come and gone freely; but she is nothing. No, the child could have no correspondence. She did, indeed, write a letter to the Queen, as you know, brother, six weeks ago; but that has never been answered, nor could any letters have harmed you, since it is only now that this young man is known to be living."

"You are right, sister. No harm can have been done. All will go well. The child must be wearied with her frenzy of grief and devotion! She will catch gladly at an excuse for change. A scene or two, and she will readily yield!"

"It is true," said the Abbess, thoughtfully, "that she has walked and ridden out lately. She has asked questions about her chateaux, and their garrisons. I have heard nothing of the stricter convent for many weeks; but still, brother, you must go warily to work."

"And you, sister, must show no relenting. Let her not fancy she can work upon you."

By this time the brother and sister were at the gateway of the convent; a lay sister presided there, but there was no *clôture*, as the strict seclusion of a nunnery was called, and the Chevalier rode into the cloistered quadrangle as naturally

as if he had been entering a secular chateau, dismounted at the porch of the hall, and followed Madame de Bellaise to the parlour, while she despatched a request that her niece would attend her there.

The parlour had no grating to divide it, but was merely a large room furnished with tapestry, carved chests, chairs, and cushions, much like other reception-rooms. A large, cheerful wood-fire blazed upon the hearth, and there was a certain air of preparation, as indeed an ecclesiastical dignity from Saumur was expected to sup with the ladies that evening.

After some interval, spent by the Chevalier in warming himself, a low voice at the door was heard, saying, "*Deus vobiscum.*" The Abbess answered, "*Et cum spiritu tuo;*" and on this monastic substitute for a knock and "come in," there appeared a figure draped and veiled from head to foot in heavy black, so as to look almost like a sable moving cone. She made an obeisance as she entered, saying, "You commanded my presence, madame?"

"Your uncle would speak to you, daughter, on affairs of moment."

"At his service. I, too, would speak to him."

"First, then, my dear friend," said the Chevalier, "let me see you. That face must not be muffled any longer from those who love you."

She made no movement of obedience, until her aunt peremptorily bade her turn back her veil. She did so, and disclosed the little face, so well known to her uncle, but less childish in its form, and the dark eyes less sparkling, though at once softer and more resolute.

"Ah! my fair niece," said the Chevalier, "this is no visage to be hidden! I am glad to see it re-embellished, and it will be lovelier than ever when you have cast off this disguise."

"That will never be," said Eustacie.

"Ah! we know better! My daughter is sending down a counterpart of her own wedding-dress for our bride of the *Mardi-Gras*."

"And who may that bride be?" said Eustacie, endeavouring to speak as though it were nothing to her.

"Nay, *ma petite!* it is too long to play the ignorant when the bridegroom is on his way from Paris."

"Madame," said Eustacie, turning to her aunt, "you cannot suffer this scandal. The meanest peasant may weep her first year of widowhood in peace."

"Listen, child. There are weighty reasons. The Duke of Anjou is a candidate for the throne of Poland, and my son is to accompany him thither. He must go as Marquis de Nid-de-Merle, in full possession of your estates."

"Let him take them," began Eustacie, but broke off halfway through, with a muttered "Oh—no."

"That is childish, as I see you perceive," said her uncle, "inconsistent with his honour."

"Does he speak of honour," said Eustacie, "who first commits a cowardly murder, and then forces himself on the widow he has made?"

"Folly, child, folly," said the Chevalier, who supposed her ignorant of the circumstances of her husband's assassination; and the Abbess, who was really ignorant, exclaimed—"*Fi donc*, niece; you know not what you say."

"I know, madame—I know from an eye-witness," said Eustacie, firmly. "I know the brutal words that embittered my husband's death; and were there no other cause, they would render wedlock with him who spoke them sacrilege." Resolutely and steadily did the young wife speak, looking at them with the dry fixed eye to which tears had been denied ever since that eventful night.

"Poor child," said the Chevalier to his sister. "She is under the delusion still. Husband! There is none in the case." Then waving his hand as Eustacie's face grew crimson, and her eyes flashed indignation, while her lips parted, "It was her own folly that rendered it needful to put an end to the boy's presumption. Had she been less wilful and more obedient, instead of turning the poor lad's head by playing at madame, we could have let him return to his island fogs; but when *she* encouraged him in contemplating the carrying her away, and alienating her and her lands from the true faith, there was but one remedy—to let him perish with the rest. My son is willing to forgive her childish pleasure in a boy's passing homage, and has obtained the King's sanction to an immediate marriage."

"Which, to spare you, my dear," added the aunt, "shall take place in our chapel."

"It shall never take place anywhere," said Eustacie, quietly, though with a quiver in her voice; "no priest will wed me when he has heard me."

"The dispensation will overcome all scruples," said the Abbess. "Hear me, niece. I am sorry for you, but it is best that you should know at once that there is nothing in heaven or earth to aid you in resisting your duty."

Eustacie made no answer, but there was a strange half-smile on her lip, and a light in her eye which gave her an air not so much of entreaty as of defiance. She glanced from one to the other as if considering, but then slightly shook her head. "What does she mean?" asked the Chevalier and the Abbess one of another, as, with a dignified gesture, she moved to leave the room.

"Follow her. Convince her that she has no hope," said the uncle; and the Abbess, moving faster than her wont, came up with her at the archway whence one corridor led to

the chapel, another to her own apartments. Her veil was down again, but her aunt roughly withdrew it, saying, "Look at me, Eustacie. I come to warn you that you need not look to tamper with the sisters. Not one will aid you in your headstrong folly. If you cast not off ere supper-time this mockery of mourning, you shall taste of that discipline you used to sigh for. We have borne with your fancy long enough—you, who are no more a widow than I—nor wife."

"Wife and widow am I in the sight of Him who will protect me," said Eustacie, standing her ground.

"Insolent! Why, did I not excuse this as a childish delusion, should I not spurn one who durst love—what say I—not a heretic merely, but the foe of her father's house?"

"He!" cried Eustacie; "what had he ever done?"

"He inherited the blood of the traitor Baron," returned her aunt. "Ever have that recreant line injured us! My nephew's sword avenged the wrongs of many generations."

"Then," said Eustacie, looking at her with a steady, fixed look of inquiry, "you, Madame l'Abbesse, would have neither mercy nor pity for the most innocent offspring of the elder line?"

"Girl, what folly is this to talk to me of innocence. That is not the question. The question is—obey willingly as my dear daughter, or compulsion must be used?"

"My question is answered," said Eustacie, on her side. "I see that there is neither pity nor hope from you."

And with another obeisance, she turned to ascend the stairs. Madame paced back to her brother.

"What," he said; "you have not yet dealt with her?"

"No, brother, I never saw a like mood. She seems neither to fear nor to struggle. I knew she was too true a Ribaumont for weak tears and entreaties; but, fiery little being as once she was, I looked to see her force spend itself in passion, and

that then the victory would have been easy; but no, she ever looks as if she had some inward resource—some security—and therefore could be calm. I should deem it some Huguenot fanaticism, but she is a very saint as to the prayers of the Church, the very torment of our lives."

"Could she escape?" exclaimed the Chevalier, who had been considering while his sister was speaking.

"Impossible! Besides, where could she go? But the gates shall be closed. I will warn the portress to let none pass out without my permission."

The Chevalier took a turn up and down the room; then exclaimed, "It was very ill-advised to let her women have access to her! Let us have Véronique summoned instantly."

At that moment, however, the ponderous carriage of Monseigneur, with out-riders, both lay and clerical, came trampling up to the archway, and the Abbess hurried off to her own apartment to divest herself of her hunting-gear ere she received her guest; and the orders to one of the nuns to keep a watch on her niece were oddly mixed with those to the cook, confectioner, and butterer.

La Mère Marie Séraphine was not a cruel or an unkind woman. She had been very fond of her pretty little niece in her childhood, but had deeply resented the arrangement which had removed her from her own superintendence to that of the Englishwoman, besides the uniting to the young Baron one whom she deemed the absolute right of Narcisse. She had received Eustacie on her first return with great joy, and had always treated her with much indulgence, and when the drooping, broken-hearted girl came back once more to the shelter of her convent, the good-humoured Abbess only wished to make her happy again.

But Eustacie's misery was far beyond the ken of her aunt, and the jovial turn of these consolations did but deepen her

agony. To be congratulated on her release from the heretic, assured of future happiness with her cousin, and, above all, to hear Berenger abused with all the bitterness of rival family and rival religion, tore up the lacerated spirit. Ill, dejected, and broken down, too subdued to fire up in defence, and only longing for the power of indulging in silent grief, Eustacie had shrunk from her, and wrapped herself up in the ceaseless round of masses and prayers, in which she was allowed to perceive a glimmering of hope for her husband's soul. The Abbess, ever busy with affairs of her convent or matters of pleasure, soon relinquished the vain attempt to console where she could not sympathise, trusted that the fever of devotion would wear itself out, and left her niece to herself. Of the seven nuns, two were decorously gay, like their Mother Abbess; one was a prodigious worker of tapestry, two were unrivalled save by one another as confectioners. Eustacie had been their pet in her younger days; now she was out of their reach, they tried in turn to comfort her; and when she would not be comforted, they, too, felt aggrieved by the presence of one whose austerity reproached their own laxity; they resented her disappointment at Sœur Monique's having been transferred to Luçon, and they, too, left her to the only persons whose presence she had ever seemed to relish,—namely, her maid Véronique, and Véronique's mother, her old nurse Perrine, wife of a farmer about two miles off. The woman had been Eustacie's foster-mother, and continued to exert over her much of the caressing care of a nurse.

After parting with her aunt, Eustacie for a moment looked towards the chapel, then, clasping her hands, murmured to herself, "No! no! speed is my best hope;" and at once mounted the stairs, and entered a room, where the large stone crucifix, a waxen Madonna, and the holy water font

gave a cell-like aspect to the room; and a straw pallet covered with sackcloth was on the floor, a richly curtained couch driven into the rear, as unused.

She knelt for a moment before the Madonna, "Ave Maria, be with me and mine. Oh! blessed Lady, thou hadst to fly with thy Holy One from cruel men. Have thou pity on the fatherless!"

Then going to the door, she clapped her hands; and, as Véronique entered, she bade her shut and bolt the door, and at the same moment began in nervous haste to throw off her veil and unfasten her dress.

"Make haste, Véronique. A dress of thine——"

"All is known, then!" cried Véronique, throwing up her arms.

"No, but he is coming—Narcisse—to marry me at once—*Mardi-Gras*——"

"*Et quoi?* Madame has but to speak the word, and it is impossible."

"And after what my aunt has said, I would die a thousand deaths ere speaking that word. I asked her, Véronique! She would have vengeance on the most guiltless—the most guiltless—do you hear?—of the Norman house. Never, never shall she have the chance! Come, thy striped petticoat!"

"But, oh! what will madame do? Where would she go? Oh! it is impossible."

"First to thy father's. Yes, I know. He has once called it a madness to think of rallying my vassals to protect their lady. That was when he heard of it from thee—thou faint of heart—and thy mother. I shall speak to him in person now. Make haste, I tell thee, girl. I must be out of this place before I am watched or guarded," she added breathlessly. "I feel as if each moment I lost might have death upon it;" and she looked about her like a startled deer.

"To my father's. Ah! there it is not so ill! But the twilight, the length of way," sobbed Véronique, in grievous distress and perplexity. "Oh! madame, I cannot see you go. The Mother Abbess is good. She must have pity. Oh, trust to her!"

"Trust! Did I not trust to my Cousin Diane? Never! Nothing will kill me but remaining in their hands."

Véronique argued and implored in vain. Ever since, in the height of those vehement austerities by which the bereaved and shattered sufferer strove to appease her wretchedness by the utmost endeavour to save her husband's soul, the old foster-mother had made known to her that she might thus sacrifice another than herself, Eustacie's elastic heart had begun to revive, with all its dauntless strength of will. What to her women seemed only a fear, was to her only a hope.

Frank and confiding as was her nature, however, the cruel deceptions already practised on her by her own kindred, together with the harsh words with which the Abbess spoke of Berenger, had made her aware that no comfort must be looked for in that quarter. It was, after all, perhaps her own instinct, and the aunt's want of sympathy, that withheld her from seeking counsel of any save Perrine and her daughter, at any rate till she could communicate with the kind young Queen. To her, then, Eustacie had written, entreating that a royal mandate would recall her in time to bestow herself in some trustworthy hands, or even in her husband's own Norman castle, where his heir would be both safe and welcome. But time had passed—the whole space that she had reckoned as needful for the going and coming of her messenger—allowing for all the obstructions of winter roads—nay, he had come back; she knew her letter was delivered, but answer there was none. It might yet come—

perhaps a royal carriage and escort—and day after day had she waited and hoped, only tardily admitting the conviction that Elisabeth of Austria was as powerless as Eustacie de Ribaumont, and meantime revolving and proposing many a scheme that could only have entered the brain of a brave-spirited child as she was. To appeal to her vassals, garrison with them a ruinous old tower in the woods, and thence send for aid to the Montmorencys; to ride to Saumur, and claim the protection of the governor of the province; to make her way to the coast and sail for England; to start for Paris, and throw herself in person on the Queen's protection,—all had occurred to her, and been discussed with her two *confidantes;* but the hope of the Queen's interference, together with the exceeding difficulty of acting, had hitherto prevented her from taking any steps, since no suspicion had arisen in the minds of those about her. Véronique, caring infinitely more for her mistress's health and well-being than for the object of Eustacie's anxieties, had always secretly trusted that delay would last till action was impossible, and that the discovery would be made, only without her being accused of treason. In the present stress of danger, she could but lament and entreat, for Eustacie's resolution bore her down; and besides, as she said to herself, her Lady was after all going to her foster-father and mother, who would make her hear reason, and bring her back at once, and then there would be no anger nor disgrace incurred. The dark muddy length of walk would be the worst of it—and, bah! most likely Madame would be convinced by it, and return of her own accord.

So Véronique, though not intermitting her protests, adjusted her own dress upon her mistress,—short striped petticoat, black bodice, winged turban-like white cap, and a great muffling grey cloth cloak and hood over the head and

shoulders—the costume in which Véronique was wont to run to her home in the twilight on various errands, chiefly to carry her mistress's linen; for, starching Eustacie's plain bands and cuffs, was Mère Perrine's special pride. The wonted bundle, therefore, now contained a few garments, and the money and jewels, especially the chaplet of pearls, which Eustacie regarded as a trust.

Sobbing, and still protesting, Véronique, however, engaged that if her Lady succeeded in safely crossing the kitchen in the twilight, and in leaving the convent, she would keep the secret of her escape as long as possible, reporting her refusal to appear at supper, and making such excuses as might very probably prevent the discovery of her flight till next day.

"And then," said Eustacie, "I will send for thee, either to Saumur, or to the old tower! Adieu, dear Véronique, do not be frightened. Thou dost not know how glad I am that the time for doing something is come! To-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" thought Véronique, as she shut the door; "before that you will be back here again, my poor little Lady, trembling, weeping, in dire need of being comforted. But I will make up a good fire, and shake out the bed. I'll let her have no more of that villanous palliasse. No, no, let her try her own way, and repent of it; then, when this matter is over, she will turn her mind to Chevalier Narcisse, and there will be no more languishing in this miserable hole."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HEARTHS AND THICKETS OF THE BOCAGE.

"I winna spare for his tender age,
Nor yet for his hie kin;
But soon as ever he born is,
He shall mount the gallows' pin."

FAUSE FOODRAGE.

DUSK was closing in, but lamps had not yet been lighted, when with a trembling, yet almost a bounding heart, Eustacie stole down the stone staircase, leading to a back-door—an utterly uncanonical appendage to a nunnery, but one much used among the domestic establishment of Bellaise.

A gleam of red light spread across the passage from the half-open kitchen door, whence issued the savoury steam of the supper preparing for Monseigneur. Eustacie had just cautiously traversed it, when the voice of the presiding lay-sister called out, "Véronique, is that you?"

"Sister!" returned Eustacie, with as much of the Angevin twang as she could assume.

"Where are you going?"

"To the Orchard Farm with this linen."

"Ah! it must be. But there are strict orders come from Madame about nobody going out unreported, and you may chance to find the door locked if you do not come back in good time. Oh! and I had well-nigh forgot; tell your

mother to be here early to-morrow, Madame would speak with her."

Eustacie assented, half stifled by the great throb of her fluttering heart at the sense that she had indeed seized the last moment. Forth then she stepped. How dark, waste, and lonely the open field looked! But her heart did not fail her; she could only feel that a captivity was over, and the most vague and terrible of her anxieties soothed, as she made her way into one of the long shady lanes of the Bocage. It was nearly dark, and very muddy, but she had all the familiarity of a native with the way, and the farm, where she had trotted about in her infancy like a peasant's child, always seemed like home to her. It had been a prime treat to visit it during her time of education at the convent, and there was an association of pleasure in treading the path that seemed to bear her up, and give her enjoyment in the mere adventure and feeling of escape and liberty. She had no fear of the dark, nor of the distant barking of dogs, but the mire was deep, and it was plodding work in those heavy *sabots*, up the lane that led from the convent; and the poor child was sorely weary long before she came to the top of the low hill that she used scarcely to know to be rising ground at all. The stars had come out; and as she sat for a few moments to rest on a large stone, she saw the lights of the cottage fires in the village below, and looking round could also see the many gleams in the convent windows, the red fire-light in her own room among them. She shivered a little as she thought of its glowing comfort, but turned her back resolutely, tightened her cloak over her head, looked up to a glimmer in the watch-tower of her own castle, far above her on the hill, and closed against her; and then smiled to herself with hope at the sparkle of a window in a lonely farmhouse among the fields.

With fresh vigour she rose, and found her way through lane and field-path to the paddock where she had so often played. Here a couple of huge dogs dashed forward with an explosion of barks, dying away into low growls as she spoke to them by their names, and called aloud on "Blaise!" and "Mère Perrine!" The cottage-door was opened, the light streamed forth, and a man's head in a broad hat appeared. "Véronique, girl, is this an hour to be gadding abroad?"

"Blaise, do you not know me?"

"It is our Lady. Ah!"

The next moment the wanderer was seated in the ample wooden chair of the head of the family, the farmer and his two stout sons standing before her as their liege Lady, and Mère Perrine hanging over her, in great anxiety, not wholly dispelled by her low girlish laugh, partly of exultation at her successful evasion, partly of amusement at their wonder, and partly, too, because it was so natural to her to enjoy herself at that hearth that she could not help it. A savoury mess from the great caldron that was for ever stewing over the fire was at once fished out for her, before she was allowed to explain herself; and as she ate with the carved spoon and from the earthenware crock that had been called Mademoiselle's ever since her baby-days, Perrine chafed and warmed her feet, fondled her, and assured her, as if she were still their spoiled child, that they would do all she wished.

Pierre and Tiennot, the two sons, were sent out to fodder the cattle, and keep careful watch for any sounds of pursuers from the convent; and Blaise, in the plenitude of his respect and deference, would have followed them, but Eustacie desired him to remain to give her counsel.

Her first inquiry was after the watch-tower. She did not care for any discomfort if her vassals would be faithful, and hold it out for her, till she could send for help to the allies

of her husband's house, and her eyes glanced as she spoke.

But Blaise shook his head. He had looked at the tower as Madame bade, but it was all in ruins, crumbling away, and, moreover, M. le Chevalier had put a forester there—a grim, bad subject, who had been in the Italian wars, and cared neither for saint nor devil, except Chevalier Narcisse. Indeed, even if he had not been there, the place was untenable, it would only be getting into a trap.

"Count Hébert held it out for twelve days against the English!" said Eustacie, proudly.

"Ah! ah! but there were none of your falconets, or what call you those cannons then. No; if Madame would present herself as a choice morsel for Monsieur le Chevalier to snap up, that is the place."

Then came the other plan of getting an escort of the peasants together, and riding with them towards the Huguenot territories around La Rochelle, where, for her husband's sake, Eustacie could hardly fail to obtain friends. It was the more practicable expedient, but Blaise groaned over it, wondered how many of the farmers could be trusted, or brought together, and finally expressed his intention of going to consult Martin, his staunch friend, at the next farm. Meantime, Madame had better lie down and sleep. And Madame did sleep, in Perrine's huge box-bedstead, with a sweet, calm, childlike slumber, whilst her nurse sat watching her with eyes full of tears of pity and distress; the poor young thing's buoyant hopefulness and absence of all fear seemed to the old woman especially sad, and like a sort of want of comprehension of the full peril in which she stood.

Not till near dawn was Eustacie startled from her rest by approaching steps. "Nurse, is all ready?" she cried. "Can we set off? Are the horses there?"

"No, my child; it is but my good man and Martin who would speak with you. Do not hasten. There is nothing amiss as yet."

"Oh nurse," cried Eustacie, as she quickly arranged the dress in which she had lain down, "the dear old farm always makes me sleep well. This is the first time I have had no dream of the whirling wheel and fiery gates! Oh, is it a token that *he* is indeed at rest? I am so well, so strong. I can ride anywhere now. Let them come in and tell me."

Martin was a younger, brisker, cleverer man than Blaise, and besides, being a vassal of the young Lady, was a sort of agent to whom the Abbess entrusted many of the matters of husbandry regarding the convent lands. He stood, like Blaise, bareheaded as he talked to the little Lady, and heard her somewhat peremptorily demand why they had not brought the horses and men for her escort.

It was impossible that night, explained Martin. Time was needed to bring in the farm-horses, and summon the other peasants, without whom the roads were unsafe in these times of disorder. He and Blaise must go round and warn them to be ready. A man could not be ready in a wink of the eye, as Madame seemed to think, and the two peasants looked impenetrable in stolidity.

"Laggards that you are!" cried Eustacie petulantly, clasping her hands; "and meantime all will be lost. They will be upon me!"

"Not so, Madame. It is therefore that I came here," said Martin, deferentially, to the little fuming impatient creature; "Madame will be far safer close at hand while the pursuit and search are going on. But she must not stay here. This farm is the first place they will come to, while they will never suspect mine, and my good woman Lucette will be proud to keep watch for her. Madame knows that

the place is full of shrubs and thickets, where one half of an army might spend a fine day in looking for the other."

"And at night you will get together the men and convey me?" asked Eustacie, eagerly.

"All in good time, Madame. Now she must be off, ere the holy mothers be astir. I have brought an ass for her to ride."

Eustacie had no choice but compliance. None of the Orchard family could go with her, as it was needful that they should stay at home and appear as unconcerned as possible; but they promised to meet her at the hour and place to be appointed, and if possible to bring Véronique.

Eating a piece of rye-bread as she went, Eustacie, in her grey cloak, rode under Martin's guardianship along the deep lanes, just budding with spring, in the chill dewiness before sunrise. She was silent, and just a little sullen, for she had found stout shrewd Martin less easy to talk over than the admiring Blaise, and her spirit was excessively chafed by the tardiness of her retainers. But the sun rose and cleared away all clouds of temper, the cocks crew, the sheep bleated, and fresh morning sounds met her ear, and seemed to cheer and fill her with hope; and in some compunction for her want of graciousness, she thanked Martin, and praised his ass with a pretty cordiality that would have fully compensated for her displeasure, even if the honest man had been sensible of it.

He halted under the lee of a barn, and gave a low whistle. At the sound, Lucette, a brown, sturdy young woman with a red handkerchief over her head, and another over her shoulders, came running round the corner of the barn, and whispered eagerly under her breath, "Ah! Madame, Madame, what an honour!" kissing Eustacie's hand with all her might as she spoke; "but, alas! I fear Madame cannot come into

the house. The questing Brother François—plague upon him—has taken it into his head to drop in to breakfast. I longed to give him the cold shoulder, but it might have brought suspicion down."

"Right, good woman," said Martin; "but what shall Madame do? It is broad day, and no longer safe to run the lanes!"

"Give me a distaff," said Eustacie, rising to the occasion, "I will go to that bushy field, and herd the cows."

Madame was right, the husband and wife unwillingly agreed. There, in her peasant dress, in the remote field, sloping up into a thick wood, she was unlikely to attract attention; and though the field was bordered on one side by the lane leading to the road to Paris, it was separated from it by a steep bank, crowned by one of the thick hedgerows characteristic of the Bocage.

Here, then, they were forced to leave her, seated on a stone beneath a thornbush, distaff in hand, with bread, cheese, and a pitcher of milk for her provisions, and three or four cows grazing before her. From the higher ground below the wood of ash and hazel, she could see the undulating fields and orchards, a few houses, and that inhospitable castle of her own.

She had spent many a drearier day in the convent than this, in the free sun and air, with the feeling of liberty, and unbounded hopes founded on this first success. She told her beads diligently, trusting that the tale of devotions for her husband's spirit would be equally made up in the field as in the church, and intently all day were her ears and eyes on the alert. Once Lucette visited her, to bring her a basin of porridge, and to tell her that all the world at the convent was in confusion, that messengers had been sent out in all directions, and that M. le Chevalier had ridden out

himself in pursuit; but they should soon hear all about it, for Martin was pretending to be amongst the busiest, and he would know how to turn them away. Again, much later in the day, Martin came striding across the field, and had just reached her, as she sat in the hedgerow, when the great dog who followed him pricked his ears, and a tramping and jingling was audible in the distance in the lane. Eustacie held up her finger, her eyes dilating.

"It must be M. le Chevalier returning. Madame must wait a little longer. I must be at home, or they may send out to seek me here, and that would be ruin. I will return as soon as it is safe, if Madame will hide herself in the hedgerow."

Into the hedgerow accordingly crept Eustacie, cowering close to a holly-tree at the very summit of the bank, and led by a strange fascination to choose a spot where, unseen herself, she could gaze down on the party who came clanking along the hollow road beneath. Nearer, nearer they came; and she shuddered, with more of passion than of fear, as she beheld, not only her uncle in his best well-preserved green suit, but Narcisse, muddy with riding, though in his court braveries. Suddenly they came to a halt close beneath her! Was she detected? Ah! just below was the spot where the road to the convent parted from the road to the farm; and, as Martin had apprehended, they were stopping for him. The Chevalier ordered one of the armed men behind him to ride up to the farm and summon Martin to speak with him; and then he and his son, while waiting under the holly-bush, continued their conversation.

"So that is the state of things! A fine overthrow!" quoth Narcisse.

"Bah! not at all. She will soon be in our hands again. I have spoken with, or written to, every governor of the

cities she must pass through, and not one will abet the little runaway. At the first barrier she is ours."

"*Et puis?*"

"Oh, we shall have her mild as a sheep." (Eustacie set her teeth.) "Every one will be in the same story, that her marriage was a nullity; she cannot choose but believe, and can only be thankful that we overlook the escapade and rehabilitate her."

"Thank you, my good uncle," almost uttered his unseen auditor.

"Well! There is too much land down here to throw away; but the affair has become horribly complicated and distasteful."

"No such thing. All the easier. She can no longer play the spotless saint—get weak-minded priests on her side—be all for strict convents. No, no; her time for that is past! Shut her up with trustworthy persons from whom she will hear nothing from without, and she will understand her case. The child? It will scarce be born alive, or at any rate she need not know whether it is. Then, with no resource, no hope, what can she do but be too thankful for pardon, and as glad to conceal the past as we could wish?"

Eustacie clenched her fist. Had a pistol been within her reach, the speaker's tenure of life had been short! She was no chastened, self-restrained, forgiving saint, the poor little thing, only a hot-tempered, generous, keenly-sensitive being, well-nigh a child in years and in impulses, though with the instincts of a mother awakening within her, and of a mother who heard the life of her unborn babe plotted against. She was absolutely forced to hold her lips together, to repress the sobbing scream of fury that came to her throat; and the struggles with her gasping breath, the surging of the blood in her ears, hindered her from hearing or seeing anything for some seconds, though she kept her station. By the time

her perceptions had cleared themselves, Martin, cap in hand, was in the lane below, listening deferentially to the two gentlemen, who were assuring him that inquiry had been made, and a guard carefully set at the barriers of all the cities round, and that it was impossible that the fugitive could have passed those, or be able to do so. She must certainly be hidden somewhere near home, and Martin had better warn all his friends against hiding her, unless they wished to be hung up on the thresholds of their burning farmsteads. Martin bowed, and thought the fellows would know their own interest and Mademoiselle's better.

"Well," said the Chevalier, "we must begin without loss of time. My son has brought down a set of fellows here, who are trained to ferret out heretics. Not a runaway weasel could escape them! We will set them on as soon as ever they have taken a bit of supper up there at the chateau; and do you come up with us just to show them the way across to Léonard's. That's no unlikely place for her to lurk in, as you said this morning, good fellow."

It was the most remote farm from that of Martin, and Eustacie felt how great were his services, even while she flushed with anger to hear him speaking of her as Mademoiselle. He was promising to follow immediately to the castle, to meet *ces Messieurs* there almost as soon as they could arrive, but excusing himself from accompanying them, by the need of driving home the big bull, whom no one else could manage.

They consented, and rode on. Martin watched them out of sight, then sprang up by some stepping stones in the bank, a little below where Eustacie sat, and came crackling through the boughs to where she was crouching down, with fierce glittering eyes and panting breath, like a wild animal ready to spring.

"Madame has heard," said Martin under his breath.

"If I have heard! Oh that I were a man, to slay them where they stood! Martin, Martin! you will not betray me. Some day *we* will reward you."

"Madame need not have said *that* to me," said Martin, rather hurt. "I am only thinking what she can do. Alas! I fear that she must remain in this covert till it is dark, for these men's eyes are all on the alert. At dark, I or Lucette will come and find a shelter for her for the night."

Long, long, then, did Eustacie sit, muffled in her grey cloak, shrinking together to shelter herself from the sunset chill of early spring, but shuddering more with horror than with cold, as the cruel cold-blooded words she had heard recurred to her, and feeling as if she were fast within a net, every outlet guarded against her, and search everywhere; yet still with the indomitable determination to dare and suffer to the utmost ere that which was dearer than her own life should come into peril from her enemies.

The twilight closed in, the stars came out, sounds of life died away, and still she sat on, becoming almost torpid in the cold darkness, until at length she heard the low call of Lucette, "*Madame! Ah! la pauvre Madame.*" She started up, so stiff that she could hardly move, and only guided by the voice to feel her way through the hedgerow in the right direction. Another moment, and Lucette's warm arms had received her; and she was guided, scarce knowing how or where, in cautious silence to the farmyard, and into the house, where a most welcome sight, a huge fire, blazed cheerfully on the hearth, and Martin himself held open the door for her. The other occupants of the kitchen were the sleeping child in its wooden cradle, some cocks and hens upon the rafters, and a big sheep-dog before the fire.

The warmth, and the chicken that Lucette had killed and

dressed, brought the colour back to the exhausted wanderer's cheek; and enabled her again to hold council for her safety. It was plain, as Martin had found in conversation with the men-at-arms, that precautions had been taken against her escaping in any of the directions where she might hope to have reached friends. Alone she could not go, and any escort sufficient to protect her would assuredly be stopped at the first town; besides which, collecting it in secret was impossible under present circumstances, and it would be sure to be at once overtaken and demolished by the Chevalier Narcisse's well-armed followers. Martin, therefore, saw no alternative but for her to lurk about in such hiding-places as her faithful vassals could afford her, until the search should blow over, and the vigilance of her uncle and cousin relax. Hope, the high-spirited hope of early youth, looked beyond to indefinite but infinite possibility. Anything was better than the shame and horror of yielding, and Eustacie trusted herself with all her heart for the present, fancying, she knew not what, the future.

Indeed, the Vendéan fidelity has often been tested, and she made full proof of it among the lanes, copses, and homesteads of her own broad lands. The whole country was a network of deep lanes, sunk between impenetrable hedgerows, inclosing small fields, orchards, and thickets, and gently undulating in low hills and shallow valleys, interspersed with tall wasp-waisted windmills airily waving their arms on the top of lofty masts. It was partitioned into small farms, inhabited by a simple-hearted peasantry, religious and diligent, with a fair amount of rural wealth and comfort. Their love for their lords was loyally warm, and Eustacie monopolized it, from their detestation of her uncle's exactions; they would risk any of the savage punishments with which they were threatened for concealing her; and as

one by one it was needful to take them into the secret, so as to disarm suspicion, and she was passed from one farm to another, each proved his faithful attachment, and thought himself repaid by her thankful smile and confiding manner.

The Chevalier and his son searched vigorously. On the slightest suspicion, they came down to the farm, closed up the outlets, threatened the owners, turned out the house, and the very place they had last searched would become her quarters on the next night! Messages always had warned her in time. Intelligence was obtained by Martin, who contrived to remain a confidential agent, and warnings were despatched to her by many a strange messenger—by little children, by old women, or even by the village innocent.

The most alarming days were those when she was not the avowed object of the chase, but when the pursuit of game rendered the coverts in the woods and fields unsafe, and the hounds might lead to her discovery. On one of these occasions Martin locked her up in the great hayloft of the convent, where she could actually hear the chants in the chapel, and distinguish the chatter of the lay-sisters in the yard. Another time, in conjunction with the sacristan, he bestowed her in the great seigneurial tribune (or squire's pew) in the village church, a tall carved box, where she was completely hidden; and the only time when she had failed to obtain warning beforehand, she stood kneading bread at a tub in Martin's cottage, while the hunt passed by, and a man-at-arms looked in and questioned the master on the last traces of the runaway.

It was seldom possible to see Mère Perrine, who was carefully watched, under the conviction that she must know where her nursling was; but one evening Véronique ventured up to Martin's farm, trusting to tidings that the gentlemen had ridden to Saumur. It had been a wet day, but the

woods had been Eustacie's only secure harbour; and when, in a bright evening gleam of the setting sun from beneath the clouds, Véronique came in sight of her Lady, the Queen's favourite, it was to see her leading by a string a little shaggy cow, with a bell round its neck, her grey cloak huddled round her, though dank with wet, a long lock of black hair streaming over her brow, her garments clinging with damp, her bare ankles scratched with thorns, her heavy *sabots* covered with mire, her cheeks pale with cold and wet.

The contrast overwhelmed poor Véronique. She dropped on her knees, sobbing as if her heart would break, and declaring that this was what the Abbess had feared; her Lady was fast killing herself.

"Hush! Véronique," said Eustacie; "that is all folly. I am wet and weary now, but oh! if you knew how much sweeter to me life is now than it was, shut up down there, with my fears. See," and she held up a bunch of purple pasque-flowers and wood-sorrel, "this is what I found in the wood, growing out of a rugged old dead root; and just by, sheltered by the threefold leaves of the alleluia-flower, was a bird's nest, the mother-bird on her eggs, watching me with the wise black eye that saw I would not hurt her. And it brought back the words I had heard long ago, of the good God caring for the sparrows; and I knew He would care the more for me and mine, because I have not where to lay my head."

"Alas!" sobbed Véronique, "now she is getting to be a saint outright. She will be sure to die! Ah, Madame—dear Madame! do but listen to me. If you did but know how Madame de Bellaise is afflicting herself on your account! She sent for me—ah! do not be angry, dear Lady?"

"I wish to hear nothing about her," said Eustacie.

"Nay, listen, *de grâce*—one moment, Madame! She has

wept, she has feared for you, all the lay-sisters say so. She takes no pleasure in hawking, nor in visiting; and she did not eat more than six of Sœur Bernardine's best conserves. She does nothing but watch for tidings of Madame. And she sent for me, as I told you, and conjured me, if I knew where you were, or had any means of finding out, to implore you to trust to her. She will swear on all the relics in the chapel never to give a hint to Messieurs les Chevaliers if only you would trust her, and not slay yourself with all this dreadful wandering."

"Never!" said Eustacie; "she said too much!"

"Ah! but she declares that, had she known the truth, she never would have said that. Ah, yes, Madame, the Abbess is good!" And Véronique, holding her mistress's cloak to secure a hearing, detailed the Abbess' plan for lodging her niece in secret apartments within the thickness of the convent walls, where Mère Perrine could be with her, and every sacred pledge should be given that could remove her fears.

"And could they make me believe them, so that the doubt and dread would not kill me in themselves?" said Eustacie.

"But it is death—certain death, as it is. Oh, if Madame would hear reason!—but she is headstrong! She will grieve when it is too late!"

"Listen, Véronique. I have a far better plan. The sacristan has a sister who weaves red handkerchiefs at Chollet. She will receive me, and keep me as long as there is need. Martin is to take me in his cart when he carries the hay to the garrison. I shall be well hidden, and within reach of your mother. And then, when my son is once come—then all will be well! The peasants will rise in behalf of their young Lord, though not for a poor helpless woman. No one will dare to dispute his claim, when I have appealed to the

King; and then, Véronique, you shall come back to me, and all will be well!"

Véronique only began to wail aloud at her mistress' obstinacy. Martin came up, and rudely silenced her, and said afterwards to his wife, "Have a care! That girl has —I verily believe—betrayed her Lady once; and if she do not do so again, from pure pity and faintness of heart, I shall be much surprised."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GHOSTS OF THE TEMPLARS.

"'Tis said, as through the aisles they passed,
They heard strange voices on the blast,
And through the cloister galleries small,
Which at mid-height thread the chancel wall,
Loud sobs and laughter louder ran,
And voices unlike the voice of man,
As if the fiends kept holiday."

SCOTT, *Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

"ILL news, Martin, I see by your look!" cried Eustacie, starting to her feet from the heap of straw on which she was sitting in his cowhouse, one early April day, about seven weeks since her evasion from the convent.

"Not so, I hope, Madame, but I do not feel at ease. Monsieur has not sent for me, nor told me his plans for the morrow, and I much doubt me whether that bode not a search here. Now I see a plan, provided Madame would trust herself to a Huguenot."

"They would guard me for my husband's sake."

"And could Madame walk half a league, as far as the Grange du Temple? There live Mathieu Rotrou and his wife, who have, they say, baffled a hundred times the gendarmes who sought their ministers. No one ever found a pastor, they say, when Rotrou had been of the congregation; and if they can do so much for an old preacher with a long

tongue, surely they can for a sweet young lady ; and if they could shelter her just for to-morrow, till the suspicion is over, then would I come for Madame with my cart, and carry her into Chollet among the trusses of hay, as we had fixed."

Eustacie was already tying her cloak, and asking for Lucette ; but she was grieved to hear that Martin had sent her to vespers to disarm suspicion, and moreover that he meant not to tell her of his new device. "The creature is honest enough," he said, "but the way to be safe with women is not to let them know."

He cut short all messages and expressions of gratitude, and leading Eustacie to a small stream, he made her creep along its course, with her feet in the water, so as to be sheltered by the boughs that hung over the banks, while he used his long strides to enable him to double back and enter into conversation with passers-by, quite off the track of the Grange du Temple, but always telling her where he should join her again, and leaving with her the great dog, whom she had come to regard as a friend and protector. Leaving the brook, he conducted her beneath hedges and by lonely woodland paths beyond the confines of her own property, to a secluded valley, so shut in by wooded hills that she had not been aware of its existence. Through an extensive orchard, she at length, when nearly spent with the walk, beheld the cluster of stone buildings, substantial as the erections of religious orders were wont to be.

Martin found a seat for her, where she might wait while he went on alone to the house, and presently returned with both the good people of the farm. They were more offhand and less deferential than were her own people, but were full of kindliness. They were middle-aged folk, most neatly clad, and with a grave, thoughtful look about them, as if life

were a much heavier charge to them than to their light-hearted neighbours.

"A fair day to you, Madame," said the farmer, doffing his wide-flapped hat. "I am glad to serve a sufferer for the truth's sake."

"My husband was," faltered Eustacie.

"*Ah! la pauvre*," cried the good woman, pressing forward as she saw how faint, heated, and exhausted was the wanderer. "Come in, *ma pauvrette*. Only a bride at the Bartholomew! Alas! There, lean on me, my dear."

To be *tutoyée* by the Fermière Rotrou was a shock; yet the kind manner was comfortable, and Eustacie suffered herself to be led into the farm-house, where, as the dame observed, she need not fear chance-comers, for they lived much to themselves, and no one would be about till their boy Robinet came in with the cows. She might rest and eat there in security, and after that they would find a hiding-place for her—safe as the horns of the altar—for a night or two; only for two nights at most.

"Nor do I ask more," said Eustacie. "Then Martin will come for me."

"Ay, I or Blaise, or whichever of us can do it with least suspicion."

"She shall meet you here," added Rotrou.

"All right, good man; I understand; it is best I should not know where you hide her. Those rogues have tricks that make it as well to know nothing. Farewell, Madame, I commend you to all the saints till I come for you on Monday morning."

Eustacie gave him her hand to kiss, and tried to thank him, but somehow her heart sank, and she felt more lonely than ever, when entirely cast loose among these absolute strangers than amongst her own vassals. Even the farm-

kitchen, large, stone-built, and scrupulously clean, seemed strange and dreary after the little, smoky, earth-built living-rooms in which her peasantry were content to live, and she never had seemed to herself so completely desolate; but all the time she was so wearied out with her long and painful walk, that she had no sooner taken some food than she began to doze in her chair.

"Father," said the good wife, "we had better take *la pauvrette* to her rest at once."

"Ah! must I go any farther?" sighed Eustacie.

"It is but a few fields beyond the yard, *ma petite*," said the good woman consolingly; "and it will be safer to take you there ere we need a light."

The sun had just set on a beautiful evening of a spring that happily for Eustacie had been unusually warm and mild, when they set forth, the dame having loaded her husband with a roll of bedding, and herself taking a pitcher of milk and a loaf of bread, whilst Eustacie, as usual, carried her own small parcel of clothes and jewels. The way was certainly not long to any one less exhausted than she; it was along a couple of fields, and then through a piece of thicket, where Rotrou held back the boughs and his wife almost dragged her on with kind encouraging words, till they came up to a stone ivy-covered wall, and coasting along it to a tower, evidently a staircase turret. Here Rotrou, holding aside an enormous bush of ivy, showed the foot of a winding staircase, and his wife assured her that she would not have far to climb.

She knew where she was now. She had heard of the old Refectory of the Knights Templars. Partly demolished by the hatred of the people upon the abolition of the Order, it had ever since lain waste, and had become the centre of all the ghostly traditions of the country; the locality of all

the most horrid tales of *revenants* told under the breath at Dame Perrine's hearth or at recreation hour at Bellaise. Her courage was not proof against spiritual terrors. She panted and leant against the wall, as she faintly exclaimed, "The Temple—there—and alone!"

"Nay, Lady, methought as *Monsieur votre mari* knew the true light, you would fear no vain terror nor power of darkness."

Should these peasants—these villeins—be bold, and see the descendant of the "bravest of knights," the daughter of the house of Ribaumont, afraid? She rallied herself, and replied manfully, "I *fear* not, no!" but then, womanfully, "But it is the Temple! It is haunted! Tell me what I must expect."

"I tell you truly, Madame," said Rotrou; "none whom I have sheltered here have seen aught. On the faith of a Christian, no evil spirit—no ghost—has ever alarmed them; but they were fortified by prayer and psalm."

"I do pray! I have a psalm-book," said Eustacie, and she added to herself, "No, they shall never see that I fear. After all, *revenants* can do nothing worse than scare one; they cannot touch one; the saints and angels will not let them—and my uncle would do much worse."

But to climb those winding stairs, and resign herself to be left alone with the Templars for the night, was by far the severest trial that had yet befallen the poor young fugitive. As her tired feet dragged up the crumbling steps, her memory reverted to the many tales of the sounds heard by night within those walls—church chants turning into diabolical songs, and ending in terrific shrieks—or of the sights that had chased bewildered travellers into thickets and morasses, where they had been found in the morning, shuddering as they told of a huge white monk, with clanking

weapons, and a burning cross of fire printed on his shoulde and breast, who stood on the walls and hurled a shrieking babe into the abyss. Were such spectacles awaiting her? Must she bear them, and could her endurance hold out? Our Lady be her aid, and spare her in her need!

At the top of the stairs she found Rotrou's hand, ready to help her out on a stone floor, quite dark, but thickly covered, as she felt and smelt, with trusses of hay, between which a glimmering light showed a narrow passage. A few steps, guided by Rotrou's hand, brought her out into light again, and she found herself in a large chamber, with the stone floor broken away in some places, and with a circular window, thickly veiled with ivy, but still admitting a good deal of evening light.

It was in fact a chamber over the vaulted refectory of the knights. The walls and vaults still standing in their massive solidity, must have tempted some peasant, or may-hap some adventurer, rudely to cover in the roof (which had of course been stripped of its leading), and thus in the unsuspected space to secure a hiding-place, often for less innocent commodities than the salt, which the iniquitous and oppressive *gabelle* had always led the French peasant to smuggle, ever since the days of the first Valois. The room had a certain appearance of comfort; there was a partition across it, a hearth with some remains of wood-ashes, a shelf, holding a plate, cup, lamp, and a few other necessaries; and altogether the aspect of the place was so unlike what Eustacie had expected, that she almost forgot the Templar as she saw the dame begin to arrange a comfortable-looking couch for her wearied limbs. Yet she felt very unwilling to let them depart, and even ventured on faltering out the inquiry whether the good woman could not stay with her,—she would reward her largely.

"It is for the love of Heaven, Madame, not for gain," said Nanon Rotrou, rather stiffly. "If you were ill, or needed me, all must then give way; but for me to be absent this evening would soon be reported around the village down there, for there are many who would find occasion against us." But, by way of consolation, they gave her a whistle, and showed her that the window of their cottage was much nearer to a loophole-slit looking towards the east than she had fancied. The whistle perpetrated a most unearthly screech, a good deal like that of an owl, but more discordant, and Nanon assured her that the sound would assuredly break her slumbers, and bring her in a few minutes at any moment of need. In fact, the noise was so like the best authenticated accounts of the shrieks indulged in by the spirits of the Temple, that Eustacie had wit enough to suspect that it might be the foundation of some of the stories; and with that solace to her alarms, she endured the departure of her hosts, Nanon promising a visit in the early morning.

The poor child was too weary to indulge in many terrors, the beneficent torpor of excessive fatigue was upon her, happily bringing slumberous oblivion instead of feverish restlessness. She strove to repeat her accustomed orisons; but sleep was too strong for her, and she was soon lying dreamlessly upon the clean homely couch prepared for her.

When she awoke, it was with a start. The moon was shining in through the circular window, making strange white shapes on the floor, all quivering with the shadows of the ivy sprays. It looked strange and eerie enough at the moment, but she understood it the next, and would have been reassured if she had not become aware that there was a low sound, a tramp, tramp, below her. "Gracious saints! The Templar! Have mercy on me! Oh! I was

too sleepy to pray! Guard me from being driven wild by fright!" She sat upright, with wide-spread eyes, and, finding that she herself was in the moonlight, through some opening in the roof, she took refuge in the darkest corner, though aware as she crouched there, that if this were indeed the Templar, concealment would be vain, and remembering suddenly that she was out of reach of the loophole-window.

And therewith there was a tired sound in the tread, as if the Templar found his weird a very lengthy one; then a long heavy breath, with something so essentially human in its sound, that the fluttering heart beat more steadily. If reason told her that the living were more perilous to her than the dead, yet feeling infinitely preferred them! It might be Nanon Rotrou after all; then how foolish to be crouching there in a fright! It was rustling through the hay. No—no Nanon; it is a male figure, it has a long cloak on. Ah! it is in the moonlight—silver hair—silver beard. The Templar! Fascinated with dismay, yet calling to mind that no ghost has power unless addressed, she sat still, crossing herself in silence, but unable to call to mind any prayer or invocation save a continuous "Ave Mary," and trying to restrain her gasping breath, lest, if he were not the Templar after all, he might discover her presence.

He moved about, took off his cloak, laid it down near the hay, then his cap, not a helmet after all, and there was no fiery cross. He was in the gloom again, and she heard him moving much as though he were pulling down the hay to form a bed. Did ghosts ever do anything so sensible? If he were an embodied spirit, would it be possible to creep past him and escape while he lay asleep? She was almost becoming familiarised with the presence, and the supernatural terror was passing off into a consideration of resources, when, behold, he was beginning to sing.

To sing was the very way the ghosts began ere they came to their devilish outcries. "Our Lady keep it from bringing frenzy. But hark! hark!" It was not one of the chants, it was a tune and words heard in older times of her life; it was the evening hymn, that the little husband and wife had been wont to sing to the Baron in the Château de Leurre —Marot's version of the 4th Psalm.

"Plus de joie m'est donnée
Par ce moyen, O Dieu Très-Haut,
Que n'ont ceux qui ont grand année
De froment et bonne vinée,
D'huile et tout ce qu'il leur fault."

If it had indeed been the ghostly chant, perhaps Eustacie would not have been able to help joining it. As it was, the familiar home words irresistibly impelled her to mingle her voice, scarce knowing what she did, in the verse—

"Si qu'en paix et sûreté bonne
Coucherai et reposerai;
Car, Seigneur, ta bonté tout ordonne
Et elle seule espoir me donne
Que sûr et seul régnant serai."

The hymn died away in its low cadence, and then, ere Eustacie had had time to think of the consequences of thus raising her voice, the new comer demanded:

"Is there then another wanderer here?"

"Ah! sir, pardon me!" she exclaimed. "I will not long importune you, but only till morning light—only till the Fermière Rotrou comes."

"If Matthieu and Anne Rotrou placed you here, then all is well," replied the stranger. "Fear not, daughter, but tell me. Are you one of my scattered flock, or one whose parents are known to me?" Then, as she hesitated, "I am

Isaac Gardon—escaped, alas! alone, from the slaughter of the Barthélemy."

"Master Gardon!" cried Eustacie. "Oh, I know! O sir, my husband loved and honoured you."

"Your husband?"

"Yes, sir, le Baron de Ribaumont."

"That fair and godly youth! My dear old patron's son! You—you! But—" with a shade of doubt, almost of dismay, "the boy was wedded—wedded to the heiress——"

"Yes, yes, I am that unhappy one! We were to have fled together on that dreadful night. He came to meet me to the Louvre—to his doom!" she gasped out, nearer to tears than she had ever been since that time, such a novelty was it to her to hear Berenger spoken of in kind or tender terms; and in her warmth of feeling, she came out of her corner, and held out her hand to him.

"Alas! poor thing!" said the minister, compassionately, "Heaven has tried you sorely. Had I known of your presence here, I would not have entered; but I have been absent long, and stole into my lair here without disturbing the good people below. Forgive the intrusion, Madame."

"No, sir, it is I who have to ask pardon. Were I not a desolate fugitive, with nowhere to hide myself, I would not incommode you."

The minister replied warmly that surely persecution was a brotherhood, even had she not been the widow of one he had loved and lamented.

"Ah! sir, it does me good to hear you say so."

And therewith Eustacie remembered the hospitalities of her loft. She perceived by the tones of the old man's voice that he was tired, and probably fasting, and she felt about for the milk and bread with which she had been supplied. It was a most welcome refreshment, though he only partook

sparingly; and while he ate, the two, so strangely met, came to a fuller knowledge of one another's circumstances.

Master Isaac Gardon had, it appeared, been residing at Paris, in the house of the watchmaker whose daughter had been newly married to his son; but on the fatal eve of St. Bartholomew, he had been sent for to pray with a sick person in another quarter of the city. The Catholic friends of the invalid were humane, and when the horrors began, not only concealed their kinsman, but almost forcibly shut up the minister in the same cellar with him. And thus, most reluctantly, had he been spared from the fate that overtook his son and daughter-in-law. A lone and well-nigh broken-hearted man, he had been smuggled out of the city, and had since that time been wandering from one to another of the many scattered settlements of Huguenots in the northern part of France, who, being left pastorless, welcomed visits from the minister of their religion, and passed him on from one place to another, as his stay in each began to be suspected by the authorities. He was now on his way along the west side of France, with no fixed purpose, except so far as, since Heaven had spared his life when all that made it dear had been taken from him, he resigned himself to believe that there was yet some duty left for him to fulfil.

Meantime the old man was wearied out; and after due courtesies had passed between him and the Lady in the dark, he prayed long and fervently, as Eustacie could judge from the intensity of the low murmurs she heard; and then she heard him, with a heavy irrepressible sigh, lie down on the couch of hay he had already prepared for himself, and soon his regular breathings announced his sound slumbers. She was already on the bed she had so precipitately quitted, and not a thought more did she give to the Templars, living or dead, even though she heard an extraordinary snapping and hissing,

and in the dawn of the morning saw a white weird thing, like a huge moth, flit in through the circular window, take up its station on a beam above the hay, and look down with the brightest, roundest eyes she had ever beheld. Let owls and bats come where they would, she was happier than she had been for months. Compassion for herself was plentiful enough, but to have heard Berenger spoken of with love and admiration seemed to quiet the worst ache of her lonely heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MOONBEAM.

"She wandered east, she wandered west,
She wandered out and in;
And at last into the very swine's stythe
The queen brought forth a son."

FAUSE FOODRAGE.

THE morrow was Sunday, and in the old refectory, in the late afternoon, a few Huguenots, warned by messages from the farm, met to profit by one of their scanty secret opportunities for public worship. The hum of the prayer, and discourse of the pastor, rose up through the broken vaulting to Eustacie, still lying on her bed; for she had been much shaken by the fatigues of the day and alarm of the night, and bitterly grieved, too, by a message which Nanon conveyed to her, that poor Martin was in no state to come for her the next day; both he and his wife having been seized upon by Narcisse and his men, and so savagely beaten in order to force from them a confession of her hiding-place, that both were lying helpless on their bed; and could only send an entreaty by the trustworthy fool, that Rotrou would find means of conveying Madame into Chollet in some cart of hay or corn, in which she could be taken past the barriers.

But this was not to be. Good Nanon had sacrificed the sermon to creep up to Eustacie, and when the congregation

were dispersing in the dusk, she stole down the stairs to her husband; and a few seconds after he was hurrying as fast as *détours* would allow him to Blaise's farm. An hour and a half later, Dame Perrine, closely blindfolded for the last mile, was dragged up the spiral staircase, and ere the bandage was removed heard Eustacie's voice, with a certain cheeriness, say, "Oh! nurse; my son will soon come!"

The full moon gave her light, and the woman durst not have any other, save from the wood-fire that Nanon had cautiously lighted and screened. The moonshine was still supreme, when some time later a certain ominous silence and half-whisper between the two women at the hearth made Eustacie, with a low cry of terror, exclaim, "Nurse, nurse, what means this? Oh! He lives! I know he lives! Perrine, I command you tell me!"

"Living! Oh, yes, my love, my Lady," answered Perrine, returning towards her; "fair and perfect as the day. Be not disquieted for a moment."

"I will—I will disquiet myself," panted Eustacie, "unless you tell me what is amiss."

"Nothing amiss," said Nanon gruffly. "Madame will give thanks for this fair gift of a daughter."

It must be owned the words felt chill. She had never thought of this! It was as if the being for whom she had dared and suffered so much, in the trust that he would be Berenger's representative and avenger, had failed her and disappointed her. No defender, no paladin, no son to be proud of! Her heart and courage sank down in her weakness as they had never done before; and, without speaking, she turned her head away towards the darkness, feeling as if all had been for nothing, and she might as well sink away in her exhaustion. Mère Perrine was more angry with Nanon than conscious of her Lady's weakness. "Woman,

you speak as if you knew not the blow to this family, and to all who hoped for better days. What, that my Lady, the heiress, who ought to be in a bed of state, with velvet curtains, lace pillows, gold caudle-cups, should be here in a vile ruin, among owls and bats, like any beggar, and all for the sake, not of a young Lord to raise up the family, but of a miserable little girl! Had I known how it would turn out, I had never meddled in this mad scheme."

Before Nanon could express her indignation, Eustacie had turned her head, opened her eyes, and called out, "Miserable! Oh! what do you mean? Oh, is it true, Nanon? is it well with her?"

"As well as heart could wish," answered Nanon, cheerily. "Small, but a perfect little piece of sugar. There, Lady, she shall speak for herself."

And as Nanon laid the babe on the young mother's bosom, the thrilling touch at once put an end to all the repinings of the heiress, and awoke far other instincts.

"My child! my little one, my poor little orphan—all cruel to her! Oh, no welcome even from thy mother! Babe, babe, pardon me, I will make it up to thee; indeed I will! Oh! let me see her! Do not take her away, dear good woman, only hold her in the moonlight!"

The full rays of the moon, shining through the gable window, streamed down very near where Eustacie lay, and by a slight movement Dame Rotrou was able to render the little face as distinctly visible to her as if it had been daylight, save that the blanching light was somewhat embellishing to the new-born complexion, and increased that curious resemblance so often borne for the first few hours of life to the future self. Eustacie's cry at once was, "Himself, himself—his very face! Let me have her, my own moonbeam —his child—my joy!"

The tears, so long denied, rushed down like summer rain as she clasped the child in her arms. Dame Perrine wandered to and fro, like one beside herself, not only at her Lady's wretched accommodations, but at the ill omens of the moonlight illumination, of the owls who snapped and hissed incessantly over the hay, and above all of the tears over the babe's face. She tried to remonstrate with Eustacie, but was answered only, "Let me weep! Oh, let me weep! It eases my heart! It cannot hurt my little one! She cannot weep for her father herself, so I must weep for her."

The weeping was gentle, not violent; and Dame Rotrou thought it did good rather than harm. She was chiefly anxious to be quit of Perrine, who, however faithful to the Lady of Ribaumont, must not be trusted to learn the way to this Huguenot asylum, and must be escorted back by Rotrou ere peep of dawn. The old woman knew that her own absence from home would be suspicious, and with many grumblings submitted; but first she took the child from Eustacie's reluctant arms, promising to restore her in a few moments, after finishing dressing her in the lace-edged swaddling bands so carefully preserved ever since Eustacie's own babyhood. In these moments she had taken them all by surprise by, without asking any questions, sprinkling the babe with water, and baptizing her by the hereditary name of Bérangère, the feminine of the only name Eustacie had always declared her son should bear. Such baptisms were not unfrequently performed by French nurses, but Eustacie exclaimed with a sound half dismay, half indignation.

"*Eh quoi!*" said Perrine, "it is only *ondoyée*. You can have all the ceremonies if ever time shall fit; but do you think I could leave my Lady's child—mere girl though it be—alone with owls, and *follets*, and *revenants*, and heretics,

and she unbaptized. She would be a changeling long ere morning, I trow."

"Come, good woman," said Rotrou, from between the trusses of hay at the entrance; "you and I must begin our Colin-Maillard again, or it may be the worse for us both."

And with the promise of being conducted to Eustacie again in three nights' time, if she would meet her guide at the cross-roads after dark, Perrine was forced to take her leave. She had never suspected that all this time Maître Gardon had been hidden in the refectory below, and still less did she guess that soon after her departure the old man was installed as her Lady's chief attendant. It was impossible that Nanon should stay with Eustacie; she had her day's work to attend to, and her absence would have excited suspicion. He, therefore, came partly up the stairs, and calling to Nanon, proffered himself to sit with "*cette pauvre*," and make a signal in case Nanon should be wanted. The good woman was thus relieved of a great care. She would not have dared to ask it of him, but with a low reverence, she owned that it was an act of great charity towards the poor Lady, who, she hoped, was falling into a tranquil sleep, but whom she would hardly have dared to leave. The pastor, though hardships, battles, and persecutions had left him childless, had been the father of a large family; and perhaps he was drawn the more strongly towards the mother and child, because he almost felt as if, in fulfilling the part of a father towards the widow of Berenger de Ribaumont, he was taking her in the stead of the widow of his own Theodore.

Had the little Baronne de Ribaumont been lodged in a tapestried chamber, between curtains of velvet and gold, with a *beauffet* by her side glistening with gold and silver plate, as would have befitted her station, instead of lying on a bed of

straw, with no hangings to the walls save cobwebs and hay, no curtains to her unglazed windows but dancing ivy-sprays and wall-flowers, no *beauffet* but the old rickety table, no attendants but Nanon and M. Gardon, no visitors but the two white owls, no provisions save the homely fare that rustic mothers lived upon—neither she nor her babe could have thriven better, and probably not half so well. She had been used to a hardy, out-of-door life, like the peasant women; and she was young and strong, so that she recovered as they did. If the April shower beat in at the window, or the hole in the roof, they made a screen of canvas, covered her with cloaks, and heaped them with hay, and she took no harm; and the pure open air that blew in was soft with all the southern sweetness of early spring-tide, and the little one throve in it like the puff-ball owlets in the hayloft, or the little ring-doves in the ivy, whose parent's cooing voice was Eustacie's favourite music. Almost as good as these her fellow-nestlings was the little Moonbeam, *la petite Rayonette*, as Eustacie fondly called this light that had come back to her from the sunshine she had lost. Had she cried or been heard, the sounds would probably have passed for the wailings of the ghostly victims of the Templars, but she exercised an exemplary forbearance in that respect, for which Eustacie thought she could not be sufficiently admired.

Like the child she was, Eustacie seemed to have put care from her, and to be solely taken up with the baby, and the amusement of watching the owl family.

There was a lull in the search at this moment, for the Chevalier had been recalled to Paris by the fatal illness of his son-in-law, M. de Selinville. The old soldier, after living half his life on bread and salad, that he might keep up a grand appearance at Paris, had, on coming into the wealth of

the family, and marrying a beautiful wife, returned to the luxuries he had been wont only to enjoy for a few weeks at a time, when in military occupation of some Italian town. Three months of festivities had been enough to cause his death; and the Chevalier was summoned to assist his daughter in providing for his obsequies, and in taking possession of the huge endowments which, as the last of his race, he had been able to bequeath to her. Such was the news brought by the old nurse Perrine, who took advantage of the slackening vigilance of the enemy to come to see Eustacie. The old woman was highly satisfied; for one of the peasants' wives had—as if on purpose to oblige her Lady—given birth to twins, one of whom had died almost immediately; and the parents had consented to conceal their loss, and at once take the little Demoiselle de Ribaumont as their own—guarding the secret till her mother should be able to claim her. It was so entirely the practice, under the most favourable circumstances, for French mothers to send their infants to be nursed in cottages, that Perrine was amazed by the cry of angry refusal that burst from Eustacie, "Part with my child! Leave her to her enemies!—never! never! Hold your tongue, Perrine! I will not hear of such a thing!"

"But, Madame, hear reason. She will pass for one of Simonette's!"

"She shall pass for none but mine!—I part with thee, indeed! All that is left me of thy father!—the poor little orphaned innocent, that no one loves but her mother!"

"Madame—Mademoiselle, this is not common sense! Why, how can you hide yourself? how travel with a baby on your neck, whose crying may betray you!"

"She never cries—never, never! And better I were betrayed than she."

"If it were a boy——" began Perrine.

"If it were a boy, there would be plenty to care for it. I should not care for it half so much. As for my poor little lonely girl, whom every one wishes away but her mother—ah! yes, baby, thy mother will go through fire and water for thee yet. Never fear, thou shalt not leave her!"

"No nurse can go with Madame. Simonette could not leave her home."

"What needs a nurse when she has me?"

"But, Madame," proceeded the old woman, out of patience, "you are beside yourself! What noble lady ever nursed her babe?"

"I don't care for noble ladies—I care for my child," said the vehement, petulant little thing.

"And how—what good will Madame's caring for it do? What knows she of infants? How can she take care of it?"

"Our Lady will teach me," said Eustacie, still pressing the child passionately to her heart; "and see—the owl—the ring-dove—can take care of their little ones; the good God shows them how—He will tell me how!"

Perrine regarded her Lady much as if she were in a naughty fit, refusing unreasonably to part with a new toy, and Nanon Rotrou was much of the same mind; but it was evident that if at the moment they attempted to carry off the babe, the mother would put herself into an agony of passion, that they durst not call forth; and they found it needful to do their best to soothe her out of the deluge of agitated tears that fell from her eyes, as she grasped the child so convulsively that she might almost have stifled it at once. They assured her that they would not take it away now—not now, at any rate; and when the latent meaning made her fiercely insist that it was to leave her neither now nor ever, Perrine made pacifying declarations that it should be

just as she pleased—promises that she knew well, when in that coaxing voice, meant nothing at all. Nothing calmed her till Perrine had been conducted away; and even then Nanon could not hush her into anything like repose, and at last called in the minister, in despair.

"Ah! sir, you are a wise man; can you find how to quiet the poor little thing? Her nurse has nearly driven her distracted with talking of the foster-parents she has found for the child."

"Not found!" cried Eustacie. "No, for she shall never go!"

"There!" lamented Nanon—"so she agitates herself, when it is but spoken of. And surely she had better make up her mind, for there is no other choice."

"Nay, Nanon," said M. Gardon, "wherefore should she part with the charge that God has laid on her?"

Eustacie gave a little cry of grateful joy. "Oh, sir, come nearer! Do you, indeed, say that they have no right to tear her from me?"

"Surely not, Lady. It is you whose duty it is to shield and guard her."

"Oh, sir, tell me again! Yours is the right religion. Oh, you are the minister for me! If you will tell me I ought to keep my child, then I will believe everything else. I will do just as you tell me." And she stretched out both hands to him, with vehement eagerness.

"Poor thing! This is no matter of one religion or another," said the minister; "it is rather the duty that the Almighty hath imposed, and that He hath made an eternal joy."

"Truly," said Nanon, ashamed at having taken the other side: "the good *pasteur* says what is according to nature. It would have gone hard with me if any one had wished to

part me from Robin or Sara; but these fine ladies, and, for that matter, *bourgeois* too, always do put out their babes; and it seemed to me that Madame would find it hard to contrive for herself—let alone the little one."

"Ah! but what would be the use of contriving for myself, without her?" said Eustacie.

If all had gone well and prosperously with Madame de Ribaumont, probably she would have surrendered an infant born in purple and in pall to the ordinary lot of its contemporaries; but the exertions and suffering she had undergone on behalf of her child, its orphanhood, her own loneliness, and even the general disappointment in its sex, had given it a hold on her vehement, determined heart, that intensified to the utmost the instincts of motherhood; and she listened as if to an angel's voice as Maître Gardon replied to Nanon—

"I say not that it is not the custom; nay, that my blessed wife and myself have not followed it; but we have so oft had cause to repent the necessity, that far be it from me ever to bid a woman forsake her sucking child."

"Is that Scripture?" asked Eustacie. "Ah! sir, sir, tell me more! You are giving me all—all—my child! I will be—I am—a Huguenot like her father! and, when my vassals come, I will make them ride with you to La Rochelle, and fight in your cause!"

"Nay," said Maître Gardon, taken by surprise; "but, Lady, your vassals are Catholic."

"What matters it? In my cause they shall fight!" said the feudal Lady, "for me and my daughter!"

And as the pastor uttered a sound of interrogative astonishment, she continued—

"As soon as I am well enough, Blaise will send out messages, and they will meet me at midnight at the cross-

roads, Martin and all, for dear good Martin is quite well now, and we shall ride across country, avoiding towns, wherever I choose to lead them. I had thought of Chantilly, for I know M. de Montmorency would stand my friend against a Guisard; but now, now I know you, sir, let me escort you to La Rochelle, and do your cause service worthy of Nid-de-Merle and Ribaumont!" And as she sat up on her bed, she held up her little proud head, and waved her right hand with the grace and dignity of a queen offering an alliance of her realm.

Maître Gardon, who had hitherto seen her as a childish though cheerful and patient sufferer, was greatly amazed, but he could not regard her project as practicable, or in his conscience approve it; and after a moment's consideration he answered, "I am a man of peace, Lady, and seldom side with armed men, nor would I lightly make one of those who enrol themselves against the King."

"Not after all the Queen-mother has done!" cried Eustacie.

"Martyrdom is better than rebellion," quietly answered the old man, folding his hands. Then he added, "Far be it from me to blame those who have drawn the sword for the faith; yet, Lady, it would not be even thus with your peasants; they might not follow you."

"Then," said Eustacie, with flashing eyes, "they would be traitors."

"Not to the King," said the pastor, gently. "Also, Lady, how will it be with their homes and families—the hearths that have given you such faithful shelter?"

"The women would take to the woods," readily answered she; "it is summer time, and they should be willing to bear something for my sake. I should grieve indeed," she added, "if my uncle misused them. They have been very good to me, but then they belong to me."

"Ah! Lady, put from you that hardening belief of seigneurs. Think what their fidelity deserves from their Lady."

"I will be good to them! I do love them! I will be their very good mistress," said Eustacie, her eyes filling.

"The question is rather of forbearing than of doing," said the minister.

"But what would you have me do?" asked Eustacie, petulantly.

"This, Lady. I gather that you would not return to your relations."

"Never! never! They would rend my babe from me; they would kill her, or at least hide her for ever in a convent —they would force me into this abhorrent marriage. No—no—no—my child and I would die a hundred deaths together rather than fall into the hands of Narcisse."

"Calm yourself, Lady; there is no present fear, but I deem that the safest course for the little one would be to place her in England. She must be heiress to lands and estates there; is she not?"

"Yes; and in Normandy."

"And your husband's mother lives? Wherefore then should you not take me for your guide, and make your way —more secretly than would be possible with a peasant escort —to one of our Huguenot towns on the coast, whence you could escape with the child to England?"

"My *belle-mère* has re-married? She has children! I would not bring the daughter of Ribaumont as a suppliant to be scorned!" said Eustacie, pouting. "She has lands enough of her own."

"There is no need to discuss the question now," said M. Gardon, gravely; for a most kind offer, involving much peril and inconvenience to himself, was thus petulantly flouted.

"Madame will think at her leisure of what would have been the wishes of Monsieur le Baron for his child."

He then held himself aloof, knowing that it was not well for her health, mental or bodily, to talk any more, and a good deal perplexed himself by the moods of his strange little impetuous convert, if convert she could be termed. He himself was a deeply learned scholar, who had studied all the bearings of the controversy; and, though bound to the French Huguenots by long service and persecution in their cause, he belonged to that class of the French Reformers who would gladly have come to terms with the Catholics at the Conference of Plassy, and regretted the more decided Calvinism that his party had since professed, and in which the Day of St. Bartholomew confirmed them. He had a strong sense of the grievous losses they suffered by their disunion from the Church. The Reformed were less and less what his ardent youthful hopes had trusted to see them; and in his old age he was a sorrow-stricken man, as much for the cause of religion as for personal bereavements. He had little desire to win proselytes, but rather laid his hand to build up true religion where he found it suffering shocks in these unsettled, neglected times; and his present wish was rather to form and guide this little wilful warm-hearted mother—whom he could not help regarding with as much affection as pity—to find a home in the Church that had been her husband's, than to gain her to his own party. And most assuredly he would never let her involve herself, as she was ready to do, in the civil war, without even knowing the doctrine which grave and earnest men had preferred to their loyalty.

He could hear her murmuring to her baby, "No, no, little one, we are not fallen so low as to beg our bread among strangers." To live upon her own vassals had seemed to her

only claiming her just rights, but it galled her to think of being beholden to stranger Huguenots; and England and her mother-in-law, without Berenger, were utterly foreign and distasteful to her.

Her mood was variable. Messages from Blaise and Martin came and went, and it became known that her intended shelter at Chollet, together with all the adjacent houses, had been closely searched by the younger Ribaumont in conjunction with the governor; so that it was plain that some treachery must exist, and that she only owed her present freedom to her detention in the ruined temple; and it would be necessary to leave that as soon as it was possible for her to attempt the journey.

The plan that seemed most feasible to the vassals was, that Rotrou should convey her in a cart of fagots as far as possible on the road to Paris; that there his men should meet her by different roads, riding their farm-horses—and Martin even hoped to be able to convey her own palfrey to her from the monastery stables; and thence, taking a long stretch across country, they trusted to be able to reach the lands of a dependant of the house of Montmorency, who would not readily yield her up to a Guise's man. But, whether instigated by Perrine, or by their own judgment, the vassals declared that, though Madame should be conducted wherever she desired, it was impossible to encumber themselves with the infant. Concealment would be impossible; rough, hasty rides would be retarded, her difficulties would be tenfold increased, and the little one would become a means of tracing her. There was no choice but to leave it with Simonette.

Angrily and haughtily did Eustacie always reject this alternative, and send fresh commands back by her messenger, to meet the same reply in another form. The strong will

and maternal instinct of the Lady was set against the shrewd, practical resolution of the stout farmers, who were about to make a terrible venture for her, and might reasonably think they had a right to prescribe the terms that they thought best. All this time Maître Gardon felt it impossible to leave her, still weak and convalescent, alone in the desolate ruin with her young child; though still her pride would not bend again to seek the counsel that she had so much detested, nor to ask for the instruction that was to make her "believe like her husband." If she might not fight for the Reformed, it seemed as if she would none of their doctrine!

But, true lady that she was, she sunk the differences in her intercourse with him. She was always prettily and affectionately grateful for every service that he rendered her, and as graciously polite as though she had been keeping house in the halls of Ribaumont. Then her intense love for her child was so beautiful, and there was so much sweetness in the cheerful patience with which she endured the many hardships of her situation, that he could not help being strongly interested in the wilful, spirited little being.

And thus time passed, until one night, when Martin ventured over to the farm with a report so serious that Rotrou, at all risks, brought him up to communicate his own tidings. Some one had given information, Véronique he suspected, and the two Chevaliers were certainly coming the next day to search with fire the old buildings of the temple. It was already dawning towards morning, and it would be impossible to do more at present than to let Rotrou build up the Lady in a vault, some little way off, whence, after the search was over, she could be released, and join her vassals the next night according to the original design.

As to the child, her presence in the vault was impossible,

and Martin had actually brought her intended nurse, Simonette, to Rotrou's cottage to receive her.

"Never!" was all Eustacie answered. "Save both of us, or neither."

"Lady," said M. Gardon as she looked towards him, "I go my way with my staff."

"And you—you more faithful than her vassals—will let me take her?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, sir, even to the world's end will I go with you."

Martin would have argued, have asked, but she would not listen to him. It was Maître Gardon who made him understand the project. There was what in later times has been termed an underground railway amid the persecuted Calvinists, and M. Gardon knew his ground well enough to have little doubt of being able to conduct the lady safely to some town on the coast, whence she might reach her friends in England. The plan highly satisfied Martin. It relieved him and his neighbours from the necessity of provoking perilous wrath, and it was far safer for her herself than endeavouring to force her way with an escort too large not to attract notice, yet not warlike enough for efficient defence. He offered no further opposition, but augured that after all she would come back a fine lady, and right them all.

Eustacie, recovering from her anger, and recollecting his services, gave him her hand to kiss, and bade him farewell with a sudden effusion of gratitude and affection that warmed the honest fellow's heart. Rewards could not be given, lest they should become a clue for her uncle; and perhaps they would have wounded both him and their kind hosts, who did their best to assist her in their departure. A hasty meal was provided by Nanon, and a basket so stored as to obviate the need of entering a village, on that day at least,

to purchase provisions; Eustacie's money and jewels again formed the nucleus of the bundle of clothes and spare swaddling-bands of her babe; her peasant dress was carefully arranged—a stout striped cloth skirt and black bodice, the latter covered by a scarlet Chollet kerchief. The winged white cap entirely hid her hair; a grey cloak with a hood could either fold round her and her child or be strapped on her shoulders. Her *sabots* were hung on her shoulder, for she had learnt to go barefoot, and walked much more lightly thus; and her little bundle was slung on a staff on the back of Maître Gardon, who in his great peasant's hat and coat looked so like a picture of St. Joseph, that Eustacie, as the light of the rising sun fell on his white beard and hair, was reminded of the Flight into Egypt, and came close to him, saying shyly, "Our Blessed Lady will bless and feel for my baby. She knows what this journey is."

"The son of the Blessed Mary assuredly knows and blesses," he answered.

CHAPTER XIX.

LA RUE DES TROIS FÉES.

"And round the baby fast and close
Her trembling grasp she folds,
And with a strong convulsive grasp
The little infant holds."

SOUTHEY.

A WILD storm had raged all the afternoon, hail and rain had careered on the wings of the wind along the narrow street of the Three Fairies, at the little Huguenot bourg of La Sablerie; torrents of rain had poached the unpaved soil into a depth of mud, and thunder had reverberated over the chimney-tops, and growled far away over the Atlantic, whose angry waves were tossing on the low sandy coast about two miles from the town.

The evening had closed in with a chill, misty drizzle, and, almost May though it were, the Widow Noémi Laurent gladly closed the shutters of her unglazed window, where small cakes and other delicate confections were displayed, and felt the genial warmth of the little fire with which she heated her tiny oven. She was the widow of a pastor who had suffered for his faith in the last open persecution, and being the daughter of a baker, the authorities of the town had permitted her to support herself and her son by carrying on a trade in the more delicate "subtilties" of the art, which

were greatly relished at the civic feasts. Noémi was a grave, sad woman, very lonely ever since she had saved enough to send her son to study for the ministry in Switzerland, and with an aching heart that longed to be at rest from the toil that she looked on as a steep ladder on her way to a better home. She occupied two tiny rooms on the ground-floor of a tall house; and she had just arranged her few articles of furniture with the utmost neatness, when there was a low knock at her door, a knock that the persecuted well understood, and as she lifted the latch, a voice she had known of old spoke the scriptural salutation, "Peace be with this house."

"*Eh quoi*, Master Isaac, is it thou? Come in—in a good hour—ah!"

As, dripping all round his broad hat and from every thread of his grey mantle, the aged traveller drew into the house a female figure whom he had been supporting on his other arm, muffled head and shoulders in a soaked cloak, with a petticoat streaming with wet, and feet and ankles covered with mire, "Here we are, my child," he said tenderly, as he almost carried her to Noémi's chair. Noémi, with kind exclamations of "*La pauvre! la pauvrette!*" helped the trembling cold hand to open the wet cloak, and then cried out with fresh surprise and pity at the sight of the fresh little infant face, nestled warm and snug under all the wrappings in those weary arms.

"See," said the poor wanderer, looking up to the old man, with a faint smile; "she is well—she is warm—it hurts her not."

"Can you take us in?" added M. Gardon, hastily; "have you room?"

"Oh yes; if you can sleep on the floor here, I will take this poor dear to my own bed directly," said Noémi.

"*Tenez*," opening a chest; "you will find dry clothes there, of my husband's. And thou," helping Eustacie up with her strong arm, and trying to take the little one, "let me warm and dry thee within."

Too much worn out to make resistance, almost past speaking, knowing merely that she had reached the goal that had been promised her throughout these weary days, feeling warmth, and hearing kind tones, Eustacie submitted to be led into the inner room; and when the good widow returned again, it was in haste to fetch some of the warm *potage* she had already been cooking over the fire, and hastily bade M. Gardon help himself to the rest. She came back again with the babe, to wash and dress it in the warmth of her oven fire. Maître Gardon, in the black suit of a Calvinist pastor, had eaten his *potage*, and was anxiously awaiting her report. "Ah! *la pauvre*, with His blessing she will sleep; she will do well. But how far did you come to-day?"

"From Sainte Lucie. From the Grange du Temple since Monday."

"Ah! is it possible? The poor child! And this little one—sure, it is scarce four weeks old?"

"Four weeks this coming Sunday."

"Ah! the poor thing. The blessing of Heaven must have been with you to bear her through. And what a lovely infant—how white—what beauteous little limbs! Truly, she has sped well. Little did I think, good friend, that you had this comfort left, or that our poor Theodore's young wife had escaped."

"Alas! no, Noémi; this is no child of Theodore's. His wife shared his martyrdom. It is I who am escaped alone to tell thee. But, nevertheless, this babe is an orphan of that same day. Her father was the son of the pious Baron de

Ribaumont, the patron of your husband, and of myself in earlier days."

"Ah!" exclaimed Noémi, startled. "Then the poor young mother—is she—can she be the lost Demoiselle de Nid-de-Merle?"

"Is the thing known here? The will of Heaven be done; but I had trusted that here the poor child might rest a while, ere she can send to her husband's kindred in England."

"She might rest safely enough, if others beside myself believed in her being your son's widow," said Noémi. "Wherefore should she not be thought so?"

"Poor Espérance! She would willingly have lent her name to guard another," said Master Gardon, thoughtfully; "and, for the sake of the child, my little Lady may endure it. Ah! there is the making of a faithful and noble woman in that poor young thing. Bravely, patiently, cheerfully, hath she plodded this weary way; and, verily, she hath grown like my own daughter to me—as I never thought to love earthly thing again; and had this been indeed my Theodore's child, I could hardly care for it more."

And as he related how he had fallen in with the forlorn Lady of Ribaumont, and all that she had dared, done, and left undone for the sake of her little daughter, good Noémi Laurent wept, and agreed with him that a special Providence must have directed them to his care, and that some good work must await one who had been carried through so much. His project was to remain here for a short time, to visit the flock who had lost their pastor on the day of the massacre, and to recruit his own strength; for he, too, had suffered severely from the long travelling, and the exposure during many nights, especially since all that was warm and sheltered had been devoted to Eustacie. And after this he proposed to go to La Rochelle, and make inquiries for a trusty messenger

who could be sent to England to seek out the family of the Baron de Ribaumont, or, mayhap, a sufficient escort with whom the Lady could travel; though he had nearly made up his mind that he would not relinquish the care of her until he had safely delivered her to her husband's mother.

Health and life were very vigorous in Eustacie; and though at first she had been completely worn out, a few days of comfort, entire rest, and good nursing restored her. Noémi dressed her much like herself, in a black gown, prim little white starched ruff, and white cap,—a thorough Calvinist dress, and befitting a minister's widow. Eustacie winced a little at hearing of the character that had been fastened upon her; she disliked for her child, still more than for herself, to take this *bourgeois* name of Gardon; but there was no help for it, since, though the chief personages of the town were Huguenot, there could be no safety for her if the report were once allowed to arise that the Baronne de Ribaumont had taken refuge there.

It was best that she should be as little noticed as possible; nor, indeed, had good Noémi many visitors. The sad and sorrowful woman had always shut herself up with her Bible and her meditations, and sought no sympathy from her neighbours, nor encouraged gossip in her shop. In the first days, when purchasers lingered to ask if it were true that Maître Gardon had brought his daughter-in-law and grandchild, her stern-faced, almost grim answer, that "*la pauvre* was ill at ease," silenced them, and forced them to carry off their curiosity unsatisfied; but it became less easy to arrange when Eustacie herself was on foot again—refreshed, active, and with an irrepressible spring of energy and eagerness that could hardly be caged down in the Widow Laurent's tiny rooms. Poor child, had she not been ill and prostrate at first, and fastened herself on the tender side of the good

woman's heart by the sweetness of an unselfish and buoyant nature in illness, Noémi could hardly have endured such an inmate, not even half a Huguenot, full of little Catholic observances like second nature to her; listening indeed to the Bible for a short time, but always, when it was expounded, either asleep, or finding some amusement indispensable for her baby; eager for the least variety, and above all spoilt by Maître Gardon to a degree absolutely perplexing to the grave woman.

He would not bid her lay aside the observances that, to Noémi, seemed almost worship of the beast. He rather reverted to the piety which originated them; and argued with his old friend that it was better to build than to destroy, and that, before the fabric of truth, superstition would crumble away of itself. The little he taught her sounded to Noémi's puzzled ears mere Christianity instead of controversial Calvinism. And, moreover, he never blamed her for wicked worldliness when she yawned; but even devised opportunities for taking her out for a walk, to see as much life as might be on a market-day. He could certainly not forget—as much as would have been prudent—that she was a high-born Lady; and even seemed taken aback when he found her with her sleeves turned up over her shapely-delicate arms, and a thick apron before her, with her hands in Veuve Laurent's flour, showing her some of those special mysterious arts of confectionery in which she had been initiated by Sœur Bernardine, when, not three years ago, she had been the pet of the convent at Bellaise. At first it was half sport and the desire of occupation, but the produce of her manipulations was so excellent as to excite quite a sensation in La Sablerie, and the échevins and baillis sent in quite considerable orders for the cakes and patties of Maître Gardon's Paris-bred daughter-in-law.

Maître Gardon hesitated. Noémi Laurent told him she

cared little for the gain—Heaven knew it was nothing to her—but that she thought it wrong and inconsistent in him to wish to spare the poor child's pride, which was unchristian enough already. "Nay," he said sadly, "mortifications from without do little to tame pride; nor did I mean to bring her here that she should turn cook and confectioner to pamper the appetite of Bailli La Grasse."

But Eustacie's first view was a bright pleasure in the triumph of her skill; and when her considerate guardian endeavoured to impress on her that there was no necessity for vexing herself with the task, she turned round on him with the exclamation, "Nay, dear father, do you not see it is my great satisfaction to be able to do something for our good hostess, so that my daughter and I be not a burden to her?"

"Well spoken, my Lady," said the pastor; "there is real nobility in that way of thinking. Yet, remember, Noémi is not without means; she feels not the burden. And the flock contribute enough for the shepherd's support, and yours likewise."

"Then let her give it to the poor creatures who so often come in begging, and saying they have been burned out of house and home by one party or the other," said Eustacie. "Let me have my way, dear sir; Sœur Bernardine always said I should be a prime *ménagère*. I like it so much"

And Madame de Ribaumont mixed sugar and dough, and twisted quaint shapes, and felt important and almost light-hearted, and sang over her work and over her child songs that were not always Marot's psalms; and that gave the more umbrage to Noémi, because she feared that Maître Gardon actually liked to hear them, though, should their echo reach the street, why it would be a peril, and still worse, a horrible scandal that out of that sober, afflicted household should proceed profane tunes such as court ladies sang.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ABBÉ.

"By day and night her sorrows fall
Where miscreant hands and rude
Have stained her pure, ethereal pall
With many a martyr's blood.
And yearns not her maternal heart
To hear their secret sighs,
Upon whose doubting way apart
Bewildering shadows rise?"

KEBLE.

IT was in the summer twilight that Eustacie, sitting on the doorstep between the two rooms, with her baby on her knees, was dreamily humming to her a tune, without even words, but one that she loved, because she had first learnt to sing it with Berenger and his friend Sidney to the lute of the latter; and its notes always brought before her eyes the woods of Montpipeau. Then it was that, low and soft as was the voice, that befell which Noémi had feared: a worn, ragged-looking young man, who had been bargaining at the door for a morsel of bread in exchange for a handkerchief, started at the sound, and moved so as to look into the house.

Noémi was at the moment not attending, being absorbed in the study of the handkerchief, which was of such fine, delicate texture that an idea of its having been stolen possessed her; and she sought the corner where, as she ex-

pected, a coat-of-arms was embroidered. Just as she was looking up to demand explanation, the stranger, with a sudden cry of "Good heavens, it is she!" pushed past her into the house, and falling on his knee before Eustacie, exclaimed, "O Lady, Lady, is it thus that I see you?"

Eustacie had started up in dismay, crying out, "Ah! M. l'Abbé, as you are a gentleman, betray me not. Oh! have they sent you to find me? Have pity on us! You loved my husband!"

"You have nothing to fear from me, Lady," said the young man, still kneeling; "if you are indeed a distressed fugitive—so am I. If you have shelter and friends—I have none."

"Is it indeed so?" said Eustacie, wistfully, yet scarce reassured. "You are truly not come from my uncle. Indeed, Monsieur, I would not doubt you, but you see I have so much at stake. I have my little one here, and they mean so cruelly by her."

"Madame, I swear by the honour of a nobleman—nay, by all that is sacred—that I know nothing of your uncle. I have been a wanderer for many weeks past; proscribed and hunted down because I wished to seek into the truth."

"Ah!" said Eustacie, with a sound of relief, and of apology, "pardon me, sir; indeed, I know you were good. You loved my husband;" and she reached out her hand to raise him, when he kissed it reverently. Little *bourgeoise* and worn mendicant as they were in dress, the air of the Louvre breathed round them; and there was all its grace and dignity as the Lady turned round to her astonished hosts, saying, "Good sir, kind mother, this gentleman is, indeed, what you took me for, a fugitive for the truth. Permit me to present to you, Monsieur l'Abbé de Méricour—at least, so he was, when last I had the honour to see him."

The last time *he* had seen her, poor Eustacie had been incapable of seeing anything save that bloody pool at the foot of the stairs.

Méricour now turned and explained. "Good friends," he said courteously, but with the *fièreté* of the noble not quite out of his tone, "I beg your grace. I would not have used so little ceremony, if I had not been out of myself at recognising a voice and a tune that could belong to none but Madame——"

"Sit down, sir," said Noémi, a little coldly and stiffly—for Méricour was a terrible name to Huguenot ears; "a true friend to this Lady must needs be welcome, above all if he comes in Heaven's name."

"Sit down and eat, sir," added Gardon, much more heartily; "and forgive us for not having been more hospitable—but the times have taught us to be cautious, and in that Lady we have a precious charge. Rest; for you look both weary and hungry."

Eustacie added an invitation, understanding that he would not sit without her permission, and then, as he dropped into a chair, she exclaimed, "Ah! sir, you are faint, but you are famished."

"It will pass," he said; "I have not eaten to-day."

Instantly a meal was set before him, and ere long he revived; and as the shutters were closed, and shelter for the night promised to him by a Huguenot family lodging in the same house, he began to answer Eustacie's anxious questions, as well as to learn from her in return, what had brought her into her present situation.

Then it was that she recollected that it had been he who, at her cousin Diane's call, had seized her when she was rushing out of the palace in her first frenzy of grief, and had carried her back to the women's apartments.

"It was that day which brought me here," he said.

And he told how, bred up in his own distant province, by a pious and excellent tutor, he had devoutly believed in the extreme wickedness of the Reformers; but in his seclusion he had been trained to such purity of faith and morals, that, when his brother summoned him to court to solicit a benefice, he had been appalled at the aspect of vice, and had, at the same time, been struck by the pure lives of the Huguenots; for truly, as things then were at the French court, crime seemed to have arrayed itself on the side of the orthodox party, all virtue on that of the schismatics.

De Méricour consulted spiritual advisers, who told him that none but Catholics could be truly holy, and that what he admired were merely heathen virtues that the devil permitted the Huguenots to display in order to delude the unwary. With this explanation he had striven to be satisfied, though eyes unblinded by guilt and a pure heart continued to be revolted at the practices which his Church, scared at the evil times, and forgetful of her own true strength, left undenounced in her partisans. And the more that the Huguenot gentlemen thronged the court, and the young Abbé was thrown into intercourse with them, the more he perplexed himself how the truth, the faith, the uprightness, the forbearance, the purity that they evinced could indeed be wanting in the zeal that made them acceptable. Then came the frightful morning when carnage reigned in every street, and the men who had been treated as favourite boon companions were hunted down like wild beasts in every street. He had endeavoured to save life, but would have speedily been slaughtered himself except for his soutane; and in all good faith he had hurried to the Louvre, to inform royalty of the horrors that, as he thought, a fanatic passion was causing the populace to commit.

He found the palace become shambles—the King himself, wrought up to frenzy, firing on the fugitives. And the next day, while his brain still seemed frozen with horror, he was called on to join in the procession of thanksgiving for the King's deliverance from a dangerous plot. Surely, if the plot were genuine, he thought, the procession should have savoured of penance and humiliation rather than of barbarous exultation! Yet these might be only the individual crimes of the Queen-mother, and of the Guises seeking to mask themselves under the semblance of zeal; and the infallible head of the visible Church would disown the slaughter, and cast it from the Church with loathing as a blood-stained garment. Behold, Rome was full of rejoicing, and sent sanction and commendation of the pious zeal of the King! Had the voice of Holy Church become indeed as the voice of a bloodhound? Was this indeed her call?

The young man, whose life from infancy had been marked out for the service of the Church—so destined by his parents as securing a wealthy provision for a younger son, but educated by his good tutor with more real sense of his obligations—felt the question in its full import. He was under no vows; he had, indeed, received the tonsure, but was otherwise unpledged, and he was bent on proving all things. The gaieties in which he had at first mingled had become abhorrent to him, and he studied with the earnestness of a newly-awakened mind in search of true light. The very fact of study and inquiry, in one of such a family as that of his brother the Duke de Méricour, was enough to excite suspicion of Huguenot inclinations. The elder brother tried to quash the folly of the younger, by insisting on his sharing the debaucheries which, whether as priest or monk, or simply as Christian man, it would be his duty to abjure; and at length, by way of bringing things to a test, insisted on his making

one of a party who were about to break up and destroy a Huguenot assembly. Unable, in his present mood, to endure the thought of further cruelty, the young Abbé fled, gave secret warning to the endangered congregation, and hastened to the old castle in Brittany, where he had been brought up, to pour out his perplexities, and seek the counsel of the good old chaplain who had educated him. Whether the kind, learned, simple-hearted tutor could have settled his mind, he had no time to discover, for he had scarcely unfolded his troubles before warnings came down that he had better secure himself—his brother, as head of the family, had obtained the royal assent to the imprisonment of the rebellious junior, so as to bring him to a better mind, and cure him of the Huguenot inclinations, which in the poor lad were simply undeveloped. But in all Catholic eyes, he was a tainted man, and his almost inevitable course was to take refuge with some Huguenot relations. There he was eagerly welcomed; instruction was poured in on him; but as he showed a disposition to inquire and examine, and needed time to look into what they taught him, as one who feared to break his link with the Church, and still longed to find her blameless and glorious, the righteous nation that keepeth the truth, they turned on him and regarded him as a traitor and a spy, who had come among them on false pretences.

All the poor lad wanted was time to think, time to examine, time to consult authorities, living and dead. The Catholics called this treason to the Church, the Huguenots called it halting between two opinions; and between them he was a proscribed, distrusted vagabond, branded on one side as a recreant, and on the other as a traitor. He had asked for a few months of quiet, and where could they be had? His grandmother had been the daughter of a Scottish nobleman in the French service, and he had once seen a nephew of hers

who had come to Paris during the time of Queen Mary's residence there. He imagined that if he were once out of this distracted land of France, he might find respite for study, for which he longed; and utterly ignorant of the real state of Scotland, he had determined to make his way to his kindred there; and he had struggled on the way to La Rochelle, cheated out of the small remains of his money, selling his last jewels and all the clothing that was not indispensable, and becoming so utterly unable to pay his passage to England, that he could only trust to Providence to find him some means of reaching his present goal.

He had been listened to with kindness, and a sympathy such as M. Gardon's large mind enabled him to bestow, where his brethren had been incapable of comprehending that a man could sincerely doubt between them and Rome. When the history was finished, Eustacie exclaimed, turning to Maître Gardon, "Ah! sir, is not this just what we sought? If this gentleman would but convey a letter to my mother-in-law——"

M. Gardon smiled. "Scotland and England are by no means the same place, Lady," he said.

"Whatever this Lady would command, wherever she would send me, I am at her service," cried the Abbé, fervently.

And, after a little further debate, it was decided that it might really be the best course, for him as well as for Madame de Ribaumont, to become the bearer of a letter and token from her, entreating her mother-in-law to notify her pleasure whether she should bring her child to England. She had means enough to advance a sufficient sum to pay Méricour's passage, and he accepted it most punctiliously as a loan, intending, so soon as her despatches were ready, to go on to La Rochelle, and make inquiry for a ship.

Chance, however, seemed unusually propitious, for the next day there was an apparition in the streets of La Sablerie of four or five weather-beaten, rollicking-looking men, their dress profusely adorned with ribbons, and their language full of strange oaths. They were well known at La Sablerie as sailors belonging to a ship of the fleet of the Count de Montgomery, the unfortunate knight whose lance had caused the death of King Henry II., and who, proscribed by the mortal hatred of Catherine de Médici, had become the admiral of a piratical fleet in the Calvinist interest, so far winked at by Queen Elizabeth that it had its head-quarters in the Channel Islands, and thence was a most formidable foe to merchant vessels on the northern and eastern coasts of France; and often indulged in descents on the coast, when the sailors —being in general the scum of the nation—were apt to comport themselves more like American buccaneers than like champions of any form of religion.

La Sablerie was a Huguenot town, so they used no violence, but only swaggered about, demanding from Bailli La Grasse, in the name of their gallant Captain Latouche, contributions and provisions, and giving him to understand that if he did not comply to the uttermost it should be the worse for him. Their ship, it appeared, had been forced to put into the harbour, about two miles off, and Maître Gardon and the young Abbé decided on walking thither to see it, and to have an interview with the captain, so as to secure a passage for Méricour at least. Indeed, Maître Gardon had, in consultation with Eustacie, resolved, if he found things suitable, to arrange for their all going together. She would be far safer out of France; and, although the Abbé alone could not have escorted her, yet Maître Gardon would gladly have secured for her the additional protection of a young, strong, and spirited man; and Eustacie, who was no scribe, was abso-

lutely relieved to have the voyage set before her as an alternative to the dreadful operation of composing a letter to the *belle-mère*, whom she had not seen since she had been seven years old, and of whose present English name she had the most indistinct ideas.

However, the first sight of the ship overthrew all such ideas. It was a wretched single-decked vessel, carrying far more sail than experienced nautical eyes would have deemed safe, and with no accommodation fit for a woman and child, even had the aspect of captain or crew been more satisfactory —for the ruffianly appearance and language of the former fully rivalled that of his sailors. It would have been mere madness to think of trusting the Lady in such hands; and, without a word to each other, Gardon and Méricour resolved to give no hint even that she and her jewels were in La Sablerie. Méricour, however, made his bargain with the captain, who undertook to transport him as far as Guernsey, whence he might easily make his way to Dorsetshire, where M. Gardon knew that Berenger's English home had been.

So Eustacie, with no small trouble and consideration, indited her letter—telling of her escape, the birth of her daughter, the dangers that threatened her child—and begging that its grandmother would give it a safe home in England, and love it for the sake of its father. An answer would find her at the Widow Noémi Laurent's, Rue des Trois Fées, La Sablerie. She could not bring herself to speak of the name of Espérance Gardon which had been saddled upon her; and even M. de Méricour remained in ignorance of her bearing this disguise. She recommended him to the kindness of her mother-in-law; and M. Gardon added another letter to the Lady, on behalf of the charge to whom he promised to devote himself until he should see them safe in friendly hands. Both letters were addressed, as best they

might be, between Eustacie's dim comprehension of the word Thistlewood, and M. Gardon's notion of spelling. "Jadis, Baronne de Ribaumont" was the securest part of the direction.

And for a token, Eustacie looked over her jewels to find one that would serve for a token; but the only ones she knew would be recognised, were the brooch that had fastened the plume in Berenger's bloody cap, and the chaplet of pearls. To part with the first, or to risk the second in the pirate-ship, was impossible, but Eustacie at last decided upon detaching the pear-shaped pearl which was nearest the clasp, and which was so remarkable in form and tint that there was no doubt of its being well known.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER THE WALNUT-TREE.

"Mistress Jean was making the elder-flower wine—
'And what brings the Laird at sic a like time?'"
LADY NAIRN, *The Laird of Cockpen.*

SUMMER was nearly ended, and Lucy Thistlewood was presiding in the great kitchen of the Manor-house, standing under the latticed window near the large oak-table, a white apron over her dress, presiding over the collecting of elderberries for the brew of household-wine for the winter. The maids stood round her with an array of beechen bowls or red and yellow crocks, while barefooted, bareheaded children came thronging in with rush or wicker baskets of the crimson fruit, which the maids poured in sanguine cascades into their earthenware; and Lucy requited with substantial slices of bread and cheese, and stout homely garments mostly of her own sewing.

Lucy was altogether an inmate of her father's house. She had not even been at Hurst Walwyn for many months; for her stepmother's reiterated hopes that Berenger would make her his consolation for all he had suffered from his French spouse rendered it impossible to her to meet him with sisterly unconsciousness; and she therefore kept out of the way, and made herself so useful at home, that Dame Annora only wondered how it had been possible to spare her so long,

and always wound up her praises by saying, that Berenger would learn in time how lucky he had been to lose the French puppet, and win the good English housewife.

If only tidings would have come that the puppet was safe married. That was the crisis which all the family desired yet feared for Berenger, since nothing else they saw would so detach his thoughts from the past as to leave him free to begin life again. The relapse brought on by the cruel reply to Osbert's message had been very formidable: he was long insensible or delirious, and then came a state of annihilated thought, then of frightfully sensitive organs, when light, sound, movement, or scent were alike agony; and when he slowly revived, it was with such sunken spirits, that his silence was as much from depression as from difficulty of speech. His brain was weak, his limbs feeble, the wound in his mouth never painless; and all this necessarily added to his listless indifference and weariness, as though all youthful hope and pleasure were extinct in him. He had ceased to refer to the past. Perhaps he had thought it over, and seen that the deferred escape, the request for the pearls, the tryst at the palace, and the detention from the king's chamber, made an uglier case against Eustacie than he could endure to own even to himself. If his heart trusted, his mind could not argue out her defence, and his tongue would not serve him for discussion with his grandfather, the only person who could act for him. Perhaps the stunned condition of his mind made the suspense just within the bounds of endurance, while trust in his wife's innocence rendered his inability to come to her aid well-nigh intolerable; and doubt of her seemed both profanity and misery unspeakable. He could do nothing. He had shot his only shaft by sending Landry Osbert, and had found that to endeavour to induce his grandfather to use further measures was worse

than useless, and was treated as mere infatuation. He knew that all he had to do was to endeavour for what patience he could win from Cecily's sweet influence and guidance, and to wait till either certainty should come—that dreadful, miserable certainty that all looked for, and his very helplessness might be bringing about—or till he should regain strength to be again effective.

And miserably slow work was this recovery. No one had surgical skill to deal with so severe a wound as that which Narcisse had inflicted; and the daily pain and inconvenience it caused led to innumerable drawbacks that often—even after he had come as far as the garden—brought him back to his bed in a dark room, to blood-letting, and to speechlessness. No one knew much of his mind—Cecily perhaps the most; and next to her, Philip—who, from the time he had been admitted to his step-brother's presence, had been most assiduous in tending him—seemed to understand his least sign, and to lay aside all his boisterous roughness in his eager desire to do him service. The lads had loved each other from the moment they had met as children, but never so apparently as now, when all the rude horse-play of healthy youths was over—and one was dependent, the other considerate. And if Berenger had made no one else believe in Eustacie, he had taught Philip to view her as the "Queen's men" viewed Mary of Scotland. Philip had told Lucy the rough but wholesome truth, that "Mother talks mere folly. Eustacie is no more to be spoken of with you than a pheasant with old brown Partlet; and Berry waits but to be well to bring her off from all her foes. And I'll go with him."

It was on Philip's arm that Berenger first crept round the bowling-green, and with Philip at his rein that he first endured to ride along the avenue on Lord Walwyn's smooth-

paced palfrey; and it was Philip who interrupted Lucy's household cares by rushing in and shouting, "Sister, here! I have wiled him to ride over the down, and he is sitting under the walnut-tree quite spent, and the three little wenches are standing in a row, weeping like so many little mermaids. Come, I say!"

Lucy at once followed him through the house, through the deep porch to the court, which was shaded by a noble walnut-tree, where Sir Marmaduke loved to sit among his dogs. There now sat Berenger, resting against the trunk, overcome by the heat and exertion of his ride. His cloak and hat lay on the ground; the dogs fawned round him, eager for the wonted caress, and his three little sisters stood a little aloof, clinging to one another and crying piteously.

It was their first sight of him; and it seemed to them as if he were behind a frightful mask. Even Lucy was not without a sensation of the kind, of this effect in the change from the girlish, rosy complexion to extreme paleness, on which was visible, in ghastly red and purple, the great scar left by Narcisse, from the temple on the one side to the ear on the other.

The far more serious wound on the cheek was covered with a black patch, and the hair had almost entirely disappeared from the head, only a few light brown locks still hanging round the neck and temples, so that the bald brow gave a strange look of age; and the disfigurement was terrible, enhanced as it was by the wasting effect of nearly a year of sickness. Lucy was so much shocked, that she could hardly steady her voice to chide the children for not giving a better welcome to their brother. They would have clung round her, but she shook them off, and sent Annora in haste for her mother's fan; while Philip arriving with a slice of diet-bread and a cup of sack, the one fanned him,

and the other fed him with morsels of the cake soaked in the wine, till he revived, looked up with eyes that were unchanged, and thanked them with a few faltering words, scarcely intelligible to Lucy. The little girls came nearer, and curiously regarded him; but when he held out his hand to his favourite Dolly, she shrank back in reluctance.

"Do not chide her," he said wearily. "May she never become used to such marks!"

"What, would you have her live among cowards?" exclaimed Philip; but Berenger, instead of answering, looked up at the front of the house, one of those fine Tudor façades that seem all carved timber and glass lattice, and asked, so abruptly that Lucy doubted whether she heard him aright,—"How many windows are there in this front?"

"I never counted," said Philip.

"I have," said Annora; "there are seven and thirty, besides the two little ones in the porch."

"None shall make them afraid," he muttered. "Who would dare build such a defenceless house over yonder?"—pointing south.

"Our hearts are guards enow," said Philip, proudly. Berenger half smiled, as he was wont to do when he meant more than he could conveniently utter, and presently he asked, in the same languid, musing tone, "Lucy, were you ever really affrighted?"

Lucy questioned whether he could be really in his right mind, as if the bewilderment of his brain was again returning; and while she paused, Annora exclaimed, "Yes, when we were gathering cowslips, and the brindled cow ran at us, and Lucy could not run because she had Dolly in her arms. Oh! we were frightened then, till you came, brother."

"Yes," added Bessie; "and last winter too, when the owl shrieked at the window——"

"And," added Berenger, "sister, what was your greatest time of revelry?"

Annora again put in her word. "I know, brother; you remember the fair-day, when my Lady Grandame was angered because you and Lucy went on dancing when we and all the gentry had ceased. And when Lucy said she had not seen that you were left alone, Aunt Cecily said it was because the eyes of discretion were lacking."

"Oh, the Christmas feast was far grander," said Bessie. "Then Lucy had her first satin farthingale, and three gallants, besides my brother, wanted to dance with her."

Blushing deeply, Lucy tried to hush the little ones, much perplexed by the questions, and confused by the answers. Could he be contrasting the life where a vicious cow had been the most alarming object, a greensward dance with a step-brother the greatest gaiety, the dye of the elder juice the deepest stain, with the temptations and perils that had beset one equally young? Resting his head on his hand, his elbow on his knee, he seemed to be musing in a reverie that he could hardly brook, as his young brow was knitted by care and despondency.

Suddenly, the sounds in the village rose from the quiet sleepy summer hum into a fierce yell of derisive vituperation, causing Philip at once to leap up, and run across the court to the entrance-gate, while Lucy called after him some vain sisterly warning against mingling in a fray.

It seemed as if his interposition had a good effect, for the uproar lulled almost as soon as he had hurried to the scene of action; and presently he reappeared, eager and breathless. "I told them to bring him up here," he said; "they would have flogged him at the cart's-tail, the rogues, just because my father is out of the way. I could not make out his jargon, but you can, brother; and make that rascal Spinks let him go."

"What should I have to do with it?" said Berenger, shrinking from the sudden exposure of his scarred face and maimed speech. "I am no magistrate."

"But you can understand him; he is French, the poor rogue—yes, French, I tell you! He shrieked out piteously to me something about a letter, and wanting to ask his way. Ah! I thought that would touch you, and it will cost you little pains," added Philip, as Berenger snatched up his broad Spanish hat, and slouching it over his face, rose, and, leaning upon Annora's shoulder, stepped forward, just as the big burly blacksmith-constable and small shrivelled cobbler advanced, dragging along, by a cord round the wrists, a slight figure with a red woollen sailor's shirt, ragged black hosen, bare head, and almost bare feet.

Doffing their caps, the men began an awkward salutation to the young Lord on his recovery, but he only touched his beaver in return, and demanded, "How now! what have you bound him for?"

"You see, my Lord," began the constable, "there have been a sort of vagrants of late, and I'll be bound 'twas no four-legged fox as took Gaffer Shepherd's lamb."

The peroration was broken off, for with a start as if he had been shot, Berenger cried aloud, "Méricour! the Abbé!"

"Ah, Monsieur, if you know me," cried the young man, raising his head, "free me from this shame—aid me in my mission!"

"Loose him, fellows," shouted Berenger; "Philip, a knife—Lucy, those scissors."

"'Tis my duty, my Lord," said Spinks gruffly. "All vagabonds to be apprehended and flogged at the cart's-tail, by her Grace's special commands. How is it to be answered to his Honour, Sir Marmaduke?"

"Oaf!" cried Philip, "you durst not have used such violence had my father been at home! Don't you see my brother knows him?"

With hands trembling with haste, Berenger had seized the scissors that, house-wife like, hung at Lucy's waist, and was cutting the rope, exclaiming in French, "Pardon, pardon, friend, for so shameful a reception."

"Sir," was the reply, without a sign of recognition, "if, indeed, you know my name, I entreat you to direct me to the château of Le Sieur Tistéfote, whose lady was once Baronne de Ribaumont."

"My mother! Ah, my friend, my friend! what would you?" he cried in a tone of tremulous hope and fear, laying one hand on Méricour's shoulder, and about to embrace him.

Méricour retreated from the embrace with surprise and almost horror. "Is it indeed you, M. le Baron? But no, my message is to no such person."

"A message—from her—speak!" gasped Berenger, starting forward as though to rend it from him; but the high-spirited young man crossed his arms on his breast, and gazing at the group with indignant scorn, made answer, "My message is from her who deems herself a widow, to the mother of the husband whom she little imagines to be not only alive, but consoled."

"Faithful! faithful!" burst out Berenger, with a wild, exultant, strangely-ringing shout. "Woe, woe to those who would have had me doubt her! Philip—Lucy—hear! Her truth is clear to all the world!" Then changing back again to French, "Ten thousand blessings on you, Méricour! You have seen her! Where—how?"

Méricour still spoke with frigid politeness. "I had the honour to part with Madame la Baronne de Ribaumont in the town of La Sablerie, among humble, Huguenot guardians,

to whom she had fled, to save her infant's life—when no aid came."

He was obliged to break off, for Berenger, stunned by the sudden rush of emotion, reeled as he stood, and would have fallen but for the prompt support of Lucy, who was near enough to guide him back to rest upon the bench, saying resentfully in French as she did so, "My brother is still very ill. I pray you, sir, have a care."

She had not half understood the rapid words of the two young men, Philip comprehended them far less, and the constable and his crew of course not at all; and Spinks pushed forward among the group as he saw Berenger sink back on the bench; and once more collaring his prisoner, exclaimed, almost angrily to Philip, "There now, sir, you've had enough of the vagabond. We'll keep him tight ere he bewitches any more of you."

This rude interference proved an instant restorative. Berenger sprang up at once, and seizing Spinks's arm, exclaimed, "Hands off, fellow! This is my friend—a gentleman. He brings me tidings of infinite gladness. Who insults him, insults me."

Spinks scarcely withdrew his hand from Méricour's neck; and scowling, said, "Very odd gentleman—very queer tidings, Master Berenger, to fell you like an ox. I must be answerable for the fellow till his Honour comes."

"Ah! *Eh quoi*, wherefore not show the *canaille* your sword?" said Méricour, impatiently.

"It may not be here, in England," said Berenger (who fortunately was not wearing his weapon). "And in good time here comes my step-father," as the gate swung back, and Sir Marmaduke and Lady Thistlewood rode through it, the former sending his voice far before him to demand the meaning of the hurly-burly that filled his court.

Philip was the first to spring to his rein, exclaiming, "Father, it is a Frenchman whom Spinks would have flogged at the cart's-tail; but it seems he is a friend of Berenger's, and has brought him tidings. I know not what—about his wife, I believe—any way he is beside himself with joy."

"Sir, your Honour," shouted Spinks, again seizing Méricour, and striving to drag him forward, "I would know whether the law is to be hindered from taking its course because my young Lord there is a Frenchman and bewitched."

"Ah," shrieked Lady Thistlewood, "I knew it. They will have sent secret poison to finish him. Keep the fellow safe. He will cast it in the air."

"Ay, ay, my Lady," said Spinks, "there are plenty of us to testify that he made my young Lord fall back as in a swoon, and reel like one distraught. Pray Heaven it have not gone further."

"Sir," exclaimed Berenger, who on the other side held his friend's hand tight, "this is a noble gentleman—the brother of the Duke de Méricour. He has come at great risk to bring me tidings of my dear and true wife. And not one word will these demented rascals let me hear with their senseless clamour."

"Berenger! You here, my boy!" exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, more amazed by this than all the rest.

"He touches him—he holds him! Ah! will no one tear him away?" screamed Lady Thistlewood. Nor would Spinks have been slow in obeying her if Sir Marmaduke had not swung his substantial form to the ground, and stepping up to the prisoner, rudely clawed on one side by Spinks, and affectionately grasped on the other side by Berenger, shouted—

"Let go, both! Does he speak English? Peace, dame! If

the lad be bewitched, it is the right way. He looks like another man. Eh, lad, what does your friend say for himself?"

"Sir," said Berenger, interpreting Méricour's words as they were spoken, "he has been robbed and misused at sea by Montgomery's pirate crews. He fled from court for the religion's sake; he met her—my wife" (the voice was scarcely intelligible, so tremulously was it spoken), "in hiding among the Huguenots—he brings a letter and a token from her to my mother."

"Ha! and you know him? You avouch him to be what he represents himself?"

"I knew him at court. I know him well. Father, make these fellows cease their insults! I have heard nothing yet. See here!" holding out what Méricour had put into his hand; "this you cannot doubt, mother."

"Parted the pearls! Ah, the little minx!" cried the Lady, as she recognised the jewels.

"I thought he had been robbed?" added Sir Marmaduke.

"The gentleman doubts?" said Méricour, catching some of the words. "He should know that what is confided in a French gentleman is only taken from him with his life. Much did I lose; but the pearl I kept hidden in my mouth."

Therewith he produced the letter. Lady Thistlewood pronounced that no power on earth should induce her to open it, and drew off herself and her little girls to a safe distance from the secret poison she fancied it contained; while Sir Marmaduke was rating the constables for taking advantage of his absence to interpret the Queen's Vagrant Act in their own violent fashion; ending, however, by sending them round to the buttery-hatch to drink the young Lord's health. For the messenger, the good knight heartily grasped his

hand, welcoming him and thanking him for having "brought comfort to yon poor lad's heart."

But there Sir Marmaduke paused, doubting whether the letter had indeed brought comfort; for Berenger, who had seized on it, when it was refused by his mother, was sitting under the tree—turning away indeed, but not able to conceal that his tears were gushing down like rain. The anxious exclamation of his step-father roused him at length, but he scarce found power or voice to utter, as he thrust the letter into the knight's hand, "Ah! see what has she not suffered for me? me, whom you would have had believe her faithless!"

He then grasped his friend's arm, and with him disappeared into the house, leaving Sir Marmaduke holding the letter in a state of the utmost bewilderment, and calling by turns on his wife and daughter to read and explain it to him.

And as Lucy read the letter, which her mother could not yet prevail on herself to touch, she felt at each word more grateful to the good Aunt Cecily, whose influence had taught her always to view Berenger as a brother, and not to condemn unheard the poor young wife. If she had not been thus guarded, what distress might not this day of joy to Berenger have brought to Lucy. Indeed, Lady Thistlewood was vexed enough as it was, and ready to carry her incredulity to the most inconsistent lengths. "It was all a trick for getting the poor boy back, that they might make an end of him altogether." Tell her they thought him dead.—"Tilley-valley! it was a mere attempt on her own good-nature, to get a little French impostor on her hands. Let Sir Duke look well to it, and take care that her poor boy was not decoyed among them. The Frenchman might be cutting his throat at that moment! Where was he? Had Sir Duke been so lost as to let them out of sight together? No one

had either pity or prudence now that her poor father was gone;" and she began to weep.

"No great fear on that score, dame," laughed the knight. "Did you not hear the lad shouting for 'Phil, Phil!' almost in a voice like old times? It does one good to hear it."

Just at twilight, Berenger came down the steps, conducting a graceful gentleman in black, to whom Lady Thistlewood's instinct impelled her to make a low courtesy, before Berenger had said, "Madam, allow me to present to you my friend, the Abbé de Méricour."

"Is it the same?" whispered Bessie to Annora. "Surely he is translated!"

"Only into Philip's old mourning suit. I know it by the stain on the knee."

"Then it is translated too. Never did it look so well on Philip! See, our mother is quite gracious to him; she speaks to him as though he were some noble visitor to my Lord."

Therewith Sir Marmaduke came forward, shook Méricour with all his might by the hand, shouted to him his hearty thanks for the good he had done his poor lad, and assured him of a welcome from the very bottom of his heart. The good knight would fain have kept both Berenger and his friend at the Manor, but Berenger was far too impatient to carry home his joy, and only begged the loan of a horse for Méricour. For himself, he felt as if fatigue or dejection would never touch him again, and he kissed his mother and his sisters, including Lucy, all round, with an effusion of delight.

"Is that indeed your step-father?" said Méricour, as they rode away together. "And the young man, is he your half-brother?"

"Brother wholly in dear love," said Berenger; "no blood relation. The little girls are my mother's children."

"Ah! so large a family all one? All at home? None in convents?"

"We have no convents."

"Ah, no. But all at home! All at peace! This is a strange place, your England."

CHAPTER XXII.

DEPARTURE.

"It is my mistress!
Since she is living, let the time run on
To good or bad."—*Cymbeline.*

Méricour found the welcome at Hurst Walwyn as kindly and more polished than that at Combe Manor. He was more readily understood, and found himself at his natural element. Lord Walwyn, in especial, took much notice of him, and conversed with him long and earnestly; while Berenger, too happy and too weary to exert himself to say many words, sat as near Cecily as he could, treating her as though she, who had never contradicted in his trust in Eustacie, were the only person who could worthily share his infinite relief, peace, and thankfulness.

Lord Walwyn said scarcely anything to his grandson that night, only when Berenger, as usual, bent his knee to ask his blessing on parting for the night, he said, gravely, "Son, I am glad of your joy; I fear me you have somewhat to pardon your grandsire. Come to my library so soon as morning prayers be over; we will speak then. Not now, my dear lad," he added, as Berenger, with tears in his eyes, kissed his hand, and would have begun; "you are too much worn and spent to make my deaf ears hear. Sleep, and take my blessing with you."

It was a delight to see the young face freed from the haggard, dejected expression that had been sadder than the outward wounds; and yet it was so questionable how far the French connexion was acceptable to the family, that when Berenger requested Mr. Adderley to make mention of the mercy vouchsafed to him in the morning devotions, the chaplain bowed, indeed, but took care to ascertain that his so doing would be agreeable to my Lord and my Lady.

He found that if Lady Walwyn was still inclined to regret that the Frenchwoman was so entirely a wife, and thought Berenger had been very hasty and imprudent, yet that the old Lord was chiefly distressed at the cruel injustice he had so long been doing this poor young thing. A strong sense of justice, and long habit of dignified self-restraint, alone prevented Lord Walwyn from severely censuring Mr. Adderley for misrepresentations; but the old nobleman recollected that Walsingham had been in the same story, and was too upright to visit his own vexation on the honestly-mistaken tutor.

However, when Berenger made his appearance in the study, looking as if not one night, but weeks, had been spent in recovering health and spirit, the old man's first word was a gentle rebuke for his having been left unaware of how far matters had gone; but he cut short the attempted reply, by saying he knew it was chiefly owing to his own overhasty conclusion, and fear of letting his grandson injure himself by vainly discussing the subject. Now, however, he examined Berenger closely on all the proceedings at Paris and at Montpipeau, and soon understood that the ceremony had been renewed, ratifying the vows taken in infancy. The old statesman's face cleared up at once; for, as he explained, he had now no anxieties as to the validity of the marriage by English law, at least, in spite of the decree from Rome, which, as he pointed out to his grandson, was wholly con-

tingent on the absence of subsequent consent, since the parties had come to an age for free will. Had he known of this, the remarriage, he said, he should certainly have been less supine. Why had Berenger been silent?

"I was commanded, sir. I fear I have transgressed the command by mentioning it now. I must pray you to be secret."

"Secret, foolish lad. Know you not that the rights of your wife and your child rest upon it?" and as the change in Berenger's looks showed that he had not comprehended the full importance of the second ceremony as nullifying the papal sentence, which could only quash the first on the ground of want of mutual consent, he proceeded, "Command, quotha? Who there had any right to command you, boy?"

"Only one, sir."

"Come, this is no moment for lovers' folly. It was not the girl, then? Then it could be no other than the miserable King—was it so?"

"Yes, sir," said Berenger. "He bade me as king, and requested me as the friend who gave her to me. I could do no otherwise, and I thought it would be but a matter of a few days, and that our original marriage was the only important one."

"Have you any parchment to prove it?"

"No, sir. It passed but as a ceremony to satisfy the Queen's scruples ere she gave my wife to me to take home. I even think the King was displeased at her requiring it."

"Was Mr. Sidney a witness?"

"No, sir. None was present, save the King and Queen, her German countess, and the German priest."

"The day?"

"Lammas-day."

"The 1st of August of the year of grace 1572. I will write to Walsingham to obtain the testimony, if possible, of

king or of priest; but belike they will deny it all. It was part of the trick. Shame upon it that a king should dig pits for so small a game as you, my poor lad!"

"Verily, my Lord," said Berenger, "I think the King meant us kindly, and would gladly have sped us well away. Methought he felt his bondage bitterly, and would fain have dared to be a true king. Even at the last, he bade me to his *garde-robe*, and all there were unhurt."

"And wherefore obeyed you not?"

"The carouse would have kept me too late for our flight."

"King's behests may not lightly be disregarded," said the old courtier, with a smile. "However, since he showed such seeming favour to you, surely you might send a petition to him privately, through Sir Francis Walsingham, to let the priest testify to your renewal of contract, engaging not to use it to his detriment in France."

"I will do so, sir. Meanwhile," he added, as one who felt he had earned a right to be heard in his turn, "I have your permission to hasten to bring home my wife?"

Lord Walwyn was startled at this demand from one still so far from recovered as Berenger. Even this talk, eager as the youth was, had not been carried on without much difficulty, repetitions, and altered phrases, when he could not pronounce distinctly enough to be understood, and the effort brought lines of pain into his brow. He could take little solid food, had hardly any strength for walking or riding; and, though all his wounds were whole, except that one unmanageable shot in the mouth, he looked entirely unfit to venture on a long journey in the very country that had sent him home a year before scarcely alive. Lord Walwyn had already devised what he thought a far more practicable arrangement; namely, to send Mr. Adderley and some of my Lady's women by sea, under the charge of Master Hobbs, a

shipmaster at Weymouth, who traded with Bordeaux for wine, and could easily put in near La Sablerie, and bring off the Lady and child, and, if she wished it, the pastor to whom such a debt of gratitude was owing.

Berenger was delighted with the notion of the sea rather than the land journey; but he pointed out at once that this would remove all objection to his going in person. He had often been out whole nights with the fishermen, and knew that a sea-voyage would be better for his health than anything,—certainly better than pining and languishing at home, as he had done for months. He could not bear to think of separation from Eustacie an hour longer than needful; nay, she had been cruelly entreated enough already; and as long as he could keep his feet, it was absolutely due to her that he should not let others, instead of himself, go in search of her. It would be almost death to him to stay at home.

Lord Walwyn looked at the pallid, wasted face, with all its marks of suffering and intense eagerness of expression, increased by the difficulty of utterance and need of subduing agitation. He felt that the long-misunderstood patience and endurance had earned something; and he knew, too, that for all his grandson's submission and respect, the boy, as a husband and father, had rights and duties that would assert themselves manfully if opposed. It was true that the sea-voyage obviated many difficulties, and it was better to consent with a good grace than drive one hitherto so dutiful to rebellion. He did then consent, and was rewarded by the lightning flash of joy and gratitude in the bright blue eyes, and the fervent pressure and kiss of his hand, as Berenger exclaimed, "Ah! sir, Eustacie will be such a daughter to you. You should have seen how the Admiral liked her!"

The news of Lord Walwyn's consent raised much commotion in the family. Dame Annora was sure her poor son would be murdered outright this time, and that nobody cared because he was only *her* son; and she strove hard to stir up Sir Marmaduke to remonstrate with her father; but the good knight had never disputed a judgment of "my Lord's" in his whole life, and had even received his first wife from his hands, when forsaken by the gay Annora. So she could only ride over to Combe, be silenced by her father, as effectually as if Jupiter had nodded, and bewail and murmur to her mother till she lashed Lady Walwyn up into finding every possible reason why Berenger should and must sail. Then she went home, was very sharp with Lucy, and was reckoned by saucy little Nan to have nineteen times exclaimed, "Tilley-valley" in the course of one day.

The effect upon Philip was a vehement insistance on going with his brother. He was sure no one else would see to Berry half as well; and as to letting Berry go to be murdered again without him, he would not hear of it; he must go, he would not stay at home; he should not study; no, no, he should be ready to hang himself for vexation, and thinking what they were doing to his brother. And thus he extorted from his kind-hearted father an avowal that he should be easier about the lad if Phil were there, and that he might go, provided Berry would have him, and my Lord saw no objection. The first point was soon settled; and as to the second, there was no reason at all that Philip should not go where his brother did. In fact, excepting for Berenger's state of health, there was hardly any risk about the matter. Master Hobbs, to whom Philip rode down ecstatically to request him to come and speak to my Lord, was a stout, honest, experienced seaman, who was perfectly at home in the Bay of Biscay, and had so strong a feudal

feeling for the house of Walwyn, that he placed himself and his best ship, the *Throstle*, entirely at his disposal. The *Throstle* was a capital sailer, and carried arms quite sufficient in English hands to protect her against Algerine corsairs or Spanish pirates. He only asked for a week to make her cabin ready for the reception of a Lady, and this time was spent in sending a post to London, to obtain for Berenger the permit from the Queen, and the passport from the French Ambassador, without which he could not safely have gone; and, as a further precaution, letters were requested from some of the secret agents of the Huguenots to facilitate his admission into La Sablerie.

In the meantime, poor Mr. Adderley had submitted meekly to the decree that sentenced him to weeks of misery on board the *Throstle*, but to his infinite relief, an inspection of the cabins proved the space so small, that Berenger represented to his grandfather that the excellent tutor would be only an incumbrance to himself and every one else, and that with Philip he should need no one. Indeed, he had made such a start into vigour and alertness during the last few days that there was far less anxiety about him, though with several sighs for poor Osbert. Cecily initiated Philip into her simple rules for her patient's treatment in case of the return of his more painful symptoms. The notion of sending female attendants for Eustacie was also abandoned: her husband's presence rendered them unnecessary, or they might be procured at La Sablerie; and thus it happened that the only servants whom Berenger was to take with him were Humfrey Holt and John Smithers, the same honest fellows whose steadiness had so much conduced to his rescue at Paris.

Claude de Méricour had in the meantime been treated as an honoured guest at Combe Walwyn, and was in good

esteem with its master. He would have set forth at once on his journey to Scotland, but that Lord Walwyn advised him to wait and ascertain the condition of his relatives there before throwing himself on them. Berenger had, accordingly, when writing to Sidney by the messenger above mentioned, begged him to find out from Sir Robert Melville, the Scottish Envoy, all he could about the family whose designation he wrote down at a venture from Méricour's lips.

Sidney returned a most affectionate answer, saying that he had never been able to believe the little shepherdess a traitor, and was charmed that she had proved herself a heroine; he should endeavour to greet her with all his best powers as a poet, when she should brighten the English Court; but his friend, Master Spenser, alone was fit to celebrate such constancy. As to M. l'Abbé de Méricour's friends, Sir Robert Melville had recognised their name at once, and had pronounced them to be fierce Catholics and Queensmen, so sorely pressed by the Douglases, that it was believed they would soon fly the country altogether; and Sidney added, what Lord Walwyn had already said, that to seek Scotland rather than France as a resting-place in which to weigh between Calvinism and Catholicism, was only the fire instead of the frying-pan; since there the parties were trebly hot and fanatical. His counsel was that M. de Méricour should so far conform himself to the English Church as to obtain admission to one of the universities, and, through his uncle of Leicester, he could obtain for him an opening at Oxford, where he might fully study the subject.

There was much to incline Méricour to accept this counsel, He had had much conversation with Mr. Adderley, and had attended his ministrations in the chapel, and both satisfied him far better than what he had seen among the French Calvinists; and the peace and family affection of the two

houses were like a new world to him. But he had not yet made up his mind to that absolute disavowal of his own branch of the Church, which alone could have rendered him eligible for any foundation at Oxford. His attainments in classics would, Mr. Adderley thought, reach such a standard as to gain one of the very few scholarships open to foreigners; and his noble blood revolted at becoming a pensioner of Leicester's, or of any other nobleman.

Lord Walwyn, upon this, made an earnest offer of his hospitality, and entreated the young man to remain at Hurst Walwyn till the return of Berenger and Philip, during which time he might study under the directions of Mr. Adderley, and come to a decision whether to seek reconciliation with his native Church and his brother, or to remain in England. In this latter case, he might perhaps accompany both the youths to Oxford, for, in spite of Berenger's marriage, his education was still not supposed to be complete. And when Méricour still demurred with reluctance to become a burden on the bounty of the noble house, he was reminded gracefully of the debt of gratitude that the family owed to him for the relief he had brought to Berenger; and, moreover, Dame Annora giggled out that, "if he would teach Nan and Bess to speak and read French and Italian, it would be worth something to them." The others of the family would have hushed up this uncalled-for proposal; but Méricour caught at it as the most congenial mode of returning the obligation. Every morning he undertook to walk or ride over to the Manor, and there gave his lessons to the young ladies, with whom he was extremely popular. He was a far more brilliant teacher than Lucy, and ten thousand times preferable to Mr. Adderley, who had once begun to teach Annora her accidence with lamentable want of success.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EMPTY CRADLE.

"Eager to know
"The worst, and with that fatal certainty
To terminate intolerable dread,
He spurred his courser forward—all his fears
Too surely are fulfilled."—SOUTHEY.

CONTRARY winds made the voyage of the *Throstle* much more tardy than had been reckoned on by Berenger's impatience; but hope was before him, and he often remembered his days in the little vessel as much happier than he had known them to be at the time.

It was in the calm days of bright October that Captain Hobbs at length was putting into the little harbour nearest to La Sablerie. Berenger, on that morning, had for the first time been seized by a fit of anxiety as to the impression his face would make, with its terrible purple scar, great patch, and bald forehead, and had brought out a little black velvet mask, called a *tour de nez*, often used in riding to protect the complexion, intending to prepare Eustacie for his disfigurement. He had fastened on a carnation-coloured sword-knot, wound a scarf of the same colour across his shoulder, clasped a long ostrich plume into his broad Spanish hat, and looked out his deeply-fringed Spanish gloves; and Philip was laugh-

ing merrily, not to say rudely, at him, for trying to deck himself out so bravely.

"See, Master Hobbs," cried the boy in his high spirits, as he followed his brother on deck, "you did not know you had so fine a gallant on board. Here be braveries for my Lady."

"Hush, Phil," broke in Berenger, who had hitherto taken all the raillery in perfect good part. "What is amiss, Master Hobbs?"

"I cannot justly say, sir," returned Master Hobbs, without taking his gaze off the coast, "but by yonder banks and creeks this should be the Sables d'Olonne; and I do not see the steeple of La Sablerie, which has always been the landmark for the harbour of St. Julien."

"What do you understand by that?" asked Berenger, more struck by his manner than his words.

"Well, sir, if I am right, a steeple that has stood three or four hundred years does not vanish out of sight like a cloud of smoke for nothing. It may be lightning, to be sure; or the Protestants may have had it down for Popery; but methinks they would have too much Christian regard for poor mariners than to knock down the only landmark on this coast till you come to Nissard spire." Then he hailed the man at the mast-head, demanding if he saw the steeple of La Sablerie. "No, no, sir." But as other portions of the land became clearer, there was no doubt that the *Throstle* was right in her bearings; so the skipper gave orders to cast anchor and lower a boat. The passengers would have pressed him with inquiries as to what he thought the absence of his landmark could portend; but he hurried about, and shouted orders, with the deaf despotism of a nautical commander; and only when all was made ready, turned round and said, "Now, sir, maybe you had best let me go ashore first, and find out how the land lies."

"Never!" said Berenger, in an agony of impatience.

"I thought so," said the captain. "Well, then, sir, are your fellows ready? Armed? All right."

So Berenger descended to the boat, followed by Philip; next came the captain, and then the two serving-men. Six of the crew were ready to row them to the shore, and were bidden by their captain to return at once to the vessel, and only return on a signal from him. The surging rush of intense anxiety, sure to precede the destined moment of the consummation of hope long deferred, kept Berenger silent, choked by something between fear and prayer; but Philip, less engrossed, asked Master Hobbs if it were not strange that none of the inhabitants of the squalid little huts on the shore had not put out to greet them in some of the boats that were drawn up on the beach.

"Poor wretches," said Hobbs; "they scarce know friend from foe, and are slow to run their heads into the lion's mouth. Strange fellows have the impudence to sail under our flag at times."

However, as they neared the low, flat, sandy shore, a few red caps peeped out at the cottage-doors, and then, apparently gaining confidence from the survey, some wiry, active figures appeared, and were hailed by Hobbs. His Bordeaux trade had rendered him master of the coast language; and a few incomprehensible shouts between him and the natives resulted in a line being thrown to them, and the boat dragged as near as possible to the landing place, when half-a-dozen ran up, splashing with their bare legs, to offer their shoulders for the transport of the passengers, both of whom were seized upon before they were aware, Philip struggling with all his might, till a call from Captain Hobbs warned him to resign himself; and then he became almost helpless with laughter

at the figure cut by the long-legged Berenger upon a small fisherman's back.

They were landed. Could it be that Berenger was only two miles—only half an hour's walk from Eustacie? The bound his heart gave as he touched the shore seemed to stifle him. He could not believe it. Yet he knew how fully he had believed it, the next moment, when he listened to what the fishermen were saying to Captain Hobbs.

"Did Monsieur wish to go to La Sablerie? Ah! then he did not know what had happened. The soldiers had been there; there had been a great burning. They had been out in their boats at sea, but they had seen the sky red—red as a furnace, all night; and the steeple was down. Surely, Monsieur had missed the steeple that was a guide to all poor seafarers; and now they had to go all the way to Brancour to sell their fish."

"And the townspeople?" Hobbs asked.

"Ah! poor things; 'twas pity of them, for they were honest folk to deal with, even if they were heretics. They loved fish at other seasons if not in Lent; and it seemed but a fair return to go up and bury as many of them as were not burnt to nothing in their church; and Dom Colombeau, the good priest of Nissard, has said it was a pious work; and he was a saint, if anyone was."

"Alack, sir," said Hobbs, laying his hand on the arm of Berenger, who seemed neither to have breathed nor moved while the man was speaking: "I feared that there had been some such bloody work when I missed the steeple. But take heart yet: your Lady is very like to have been out of the way. We might make for La Rochelle, and there learn!" Then, again to the fisherman, "None escaped, fellow?"

"Not one," replied the man. "They say that one of the great folks was in a special rage with them for sheltering the

Lady he should have wedded, but who had broken convent and turned heretic; and they had victualled Montgomery's pirates too."

"And the Lady?" continued Hobbs, ever trying to get a more supporting hold of his young charge, in case the rigid tension of his limbs should suddenly relax.

"I cannot tell, sir. I am a poor fisher; but I could guide you to the place where old Gillot is always poking about. He listened to their preachings, and knows more than we do."

"Let us go," said Berenger, at once beginning to stride along in his heavy boots through the deep sand. Philip, who had hardly understood a word of the *patois*, caught hold of him, and begged to be told what had happened; but Master Hobbs drew the boy off, and explained to him and to the two men what were the dreadful tidings that had wrought such a change in Berenger's demeanour. The way over the shifting sands was toilsome enough to all the rest of the party; but Berenger scarcely seemed to feel the deep plunge at every step as they almost ploughed their way along for the weary two miles, before a few green bushes and half-choked trees showed that they were reaching the confines of the sandy waste. Berenger had not uttered a word the whole time, and his silence hushed the others. The ground began to rise, grass was seen still struggling to grow, and presently a large straggling mass of black and grey ruins revealed themselves, with the remains of a once well-trodden road leading to them. But the road led to a gateway choked by a fallen jamb and barred door, and the guide led them round the ruins of the wall to the opening where the breach had been. The sand was already blowing in, and no doubt veiled much; for the streets were scarcely traceable through remnants of houses more or less dilapidated, with shreds of broken or burnt household furniture within them.

"Ask him for *la rue des Trois Fées*," hoarsely whispered Berenger.

The fisherman nodded, but soon seemed at fault; and an old man, followed by a few children, soon appearing, laden with pieces of fuel, he appealed to him as Father Gillot, and asked whether he could find the street. The old man seemed at home in the ruins, and led the way readily. "Did he know the Widow Laurent's house?"

"Mademoiselle[1] Laurent! Full well he knew her; a good pious soul was she, always ready to die for the truth," he added, as he read sympathy in the faces round; "and no doubt she had witnessed a good confession."

"Knew he aught of the Lady she had lodged?"

"He knew nothing of ladies. Something he had heard of the good widow having sheltered that shining light, Isaac Gardon, quenched, no doubt, in the same destruction; but for his part, he had a daughter in one of the isles out there, who always sent for him if she suspected danger here on the mainland, and he had only returned to his poor farm a day or two after Michaelmas." So saying, he led them to the threshold of a ruinous building, in the very centre, as it were, of the desolation, and said, "That, gentlemen, is where the poor honest widow kept her little shop."

Black, burnt, dreary, lay the hospitable abode. The building had fallen, but the beams of the upper floor had fallen aslant, so as to shelter a portion of the lower room, where the red-tile pavement, the hearth with the grey ashes of the harmless home-fire, some unbroken crocks, a chain, and a *sabot*, were still visible, making the contrast of dreariness doubly mournful.

Berenger had stepped over the threshold, with his hat in his hand, as if the ruin were a sacred place to him, and stood

[1] This was the title of *bourgeoise* wives, for many years, in France.

gazing in a transfixed, deadened way. The captain asked where the remains were.

"Our people," said the old man and the fisher, "laid them by night in the earth near the church."

Just then Berenger's gaze fell on something half hidden under the fallen timbers. He instantly sprang forward, and used all his strength to drag it out in so headlong a manner that all the rest hurried to prevent his reckless proceedings from bringing the heavy beams down on his head. When brought to light, the object proved to be one of the dark, heavy, wooden cradles used by the French peasantry, shining with age, but untouched by fire.

"Look in," Berenger signed to Philip, his own eyes averted, his mouth set.

The cradle was empty, totally empty, save for a woollen covering, a little mattress, and a string of small yellow shells threaded.

Berenger held out his hand, grasped the baby-plaything convulsively, then dropped upon his knees clasping his hands over his ashy face, the string of shells still wound among his fingers. Perhaps he had hitherto hardly realized the existence of his child, and was solely wrapped up in the thought of his wife; but the wooden cradle, the homely toy, stirred up fresh depths of feeling; he saw Eustacie with her tender sweetness as a mother, he beheld the little likeness of her in the cradle; and oh! that this should have been the end! Unable to repress a moan of anguish from a bursting heart, he laid his face against the senseless wood, and kissed it again and again, then lay motionless against it save for the long-drawn gasps and sobs that shook his frame. Philip, torn to the heart, would have almost forcibly drawn him away; but Master Hobbs, with tears running down his honest cheeks, withheld the boy. "Don't ye, Master

Thistlewood, 'twill do him good. Poor young gentleman! I know how it was when I came home and found our first little lad, that we had thought so much on, had been taken. But then he was safe laid in his own churchyard, and his mother was there to meet me; while your poor brother—— Ah! God comfort him!"

"*Le pauvre Monsieur!*" exclaimed the old peasant, struck at the sight of his grief, "was it then his child? And he, no doubt, lying wounded elsewhere while God's hand was heavy on this place. Yet he might hear more. They said the priest came down and carried off the little ones to be bred up in convents."

"Who?—where?" asked Berenger, raising his head as if catching at a straw in this drowning of all his hopes.

"'Tis true," added the fisherman. "It was the holy priest of Nissard, for he sent down to St. Julien for a woman to nurse the babes."

"To Nissard, then," said Berenger, rising.

"It is but a chance," said the old Huguenot; "many of the innocents were with their mothers in yonder church. Better for them to perish like the babes of Bethlehem than to be bred up in the house of Baal; but perhaps Monsieur is English, and if so he might yet obtain the child. Yet he must not hope too much."

"No, for there was many a little corpse among those we buried," said the fisher. "Will the gentleman see the place?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Philip, understanding the actions, and indeed many of the words; "this place will kill him."

"To the grave," said Berenger, as if he heard nothing.

"See," added Philip, "there are better things than graves," and he pointed to a young green sucker of a vine, which,

stimulated by the burnt soil, had shot up between the tiles of the floor. "Look, there is hope to meet you even here."

Berenger merely answered by gathering a leaf from the vine and putting it into his bosom; and Philip, whom only extreme need could have thus inspired, perceived that he accepted it as the augury of hope.

Berenger turned to bid the two men bear the cradle with them, and then followed the old man out into the *place*, once a pleasant open paved square, now grass-grown and forlorn. On one side lay the remains of the church. The Huguenots had been so predominant at La Sablerie as to have engrossed the building, and it had therefore shared the general destruction, and lay in utter, desolate ruin, a mere shell, and the once noble spire, the mariner's guiding star, blown up with gunpowder in the lawless rage of Anjou's army, one of the most cruel that ever desolated the country. Beyond lay the burial-ground, in unspeakable dreariness. The crosses of the Catholic dead had been levelled by the fanaticism of the Huguenots, and though a great dominant stone cross raised on steps had been re-erected, it stood uneven, tottering and desolate among nettles, weeds, and briers. There seemed to have been a few deep trenches dug to receive the bodies of the many victims of the siege, and only rudely and slightly filled in with loose earth, on which Philip treading had nearly sunk in, so much to his horror that he could hardly endure the long contemplation in which his brother stood gazing on the dismal scene, as if to bear it away with him. Did the fair being he had left in a king's palace sleep her last sleep amid the tangled grass, the thistles and briers that grew so close that it was hardly possible to keep from stumbling over them, where all memorials of friend or foe were alike obliterated? Was a resting-place among these nameless graves the best he could hope for the wife whose eyes he

had hoped by this time would be answering his own—was this her shelter from foe, from sword, famine, and fire?

A great sea-bird, swooping along with broad wings and wild wailing cry, completed the weird dismay that had seized on Philip, and clutching at his brother's cloak, he exclaimed, "Berry, Berry, let us begone, or we shall both be distraught!"

Berenger yielded passively, but when the ruins of the town had been again crossed, and the sad little party, after amply rewarding the old man, were about to return to St. Julien, he stood still, saying, "Which is the way to Nissard?" and, as the men pointed to the south, he added, "Show me the way thither."

Captain Hobbs now interfered. He knew the position of Nissard, among dangerous sandbanks, between which a boat could only venture at the higher tides, and by daylight. To go the six miles thither at present would make it almost impossible to return to the *Throstle* that night, and it was absolutely necessary that he at least should do this. He therefore wished the young gentleman to return with him on board, sleep there, and be put ashore at Nissard as soon as it should be possible in the morning. But Berenger shook his head. He could not rest for a moment till he had ascertained the fate of Eustacie's child. Action alone could quench the horror of what he had recognised as her own lot, and the very pursuit of this one thread of hope seemed needful to him to make it substantial. He would hear of nothing but walking at once to Nissard; and Captain Hobbs, finding it impossible to debate the point with one so dazed and crushed with grief, and learning from the fishermen that not only was the priest one of the kindest and most hospitable men living, but that there was a tolerable *cabaret* not far from the house, selected from the loiterers who had accompanied them

from St. Julien a trustworthy-looking, active lad as a guide, and agreed with Philip to come to Nissard in his boat with the high tide on the morrow, either to concert measures for obtaining possession of the lost infant, or, if all were in vain, to fetch them off. Then he, with the mass of stragglers from St. Julien, went off direct for the coast, while the two young brothers, their two attendants, and the fisherman, turned southwards along the summit of the dreary sandbanks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GOOD PRIEST OF NISSARD.

"Till at the set of sun all tracks and ways
In darkness lay enshrouded. And e'en thus
The utmost limit of the great profound
At length we reach'd, where in dark gloom and mist
Cimmeria's people and their city lie
Enveloped ever."

Odyssey (MUSGROVE).

THE October afternoon had set in before the brothers were on the way to Nissard; and in spite of Berenger's excited mood, the walk through the soft, sinking sand could not be speedily performed. It was that peculiar sand-drift which is the curse of so many coasts, slowly, silently, irresistibly flowing, blowing, creeping in, and gradually choking all vegetation and habitation. Soft and almost impalpable, it lay heaped in banks yielding as air, and yet far more than deep enough to swallow up man and horse. Nay, tops of trees, summits of chimneys, told what it had already swallowed. The whole scene far and wide presented nothing but the lone, tame undulations, liable to be changed by every wind, and solitary beyond expression—a few rabbits scudding hither and thither, or a sea-gull floating with white, ghostly wings in the air, being the only living things visible. On the one hand a dim, purple horizon showed that the inhabited country lay miles inland; on the other lay the pale

grey, misty expanse of sea, on which Philip's eyes could lovingly discern the *Throstle's* masts.

That view was Philip's chief comfort. The boy was feeling more eerie and uncomfortable than ever he had been before as he plodded along, sinking deep with every step almost up to his ankles in the sand, on which the bare-footed guide ran lightly, and Berenger, though sinking no less deeply, seemed insensible to all inconveniences. This desolateness was well-nigh unbearable; no one dared to speak while Berenger thus moved on in the unapproachableness of his great grief, and Philip presently began to feel a dreamy sense that they had all thus been moving on for years, that this was the world's end, the land of shadows, and that his brother was a ghost already. Besides vague alarms like these, there was the dismal English and Protestant prejudice in full force in Philip's mind, which regarded the present ground as necessarily hostile, and all Frenchmen, above all French priests, as in league to cut off every Englishman and Protestant. He believed himself in a country full of murderers, and was walking on with the one determination that his brother should not rush on danger without him, and that the Popish rogues should be kept in mind that there was an English ship in sight. Alas! that consolation was soon lost, for a dense grey mist was slowly creeping in from the sea, and blotted out the vessel, then gathered in closer, and obliterated all landmarks. Gradually it turned to a heavy rain, and about the same time the ground on which they walked became no longer loose sand-hills, but smooth and level. It was harder likewise from the wet, and this afforded better walking, but there lay upon it fragments of weed and shell, as though it were liable to be covered by the sea, and there was a low, languid plash of the tide, which could not be seen. Twilight began to deepen the mist. The guide

was evidently uneasy; he sidled up to Philip, and began to ask what he—hitherto obstinately deaf and contemptuous to French—was very slow to comprehend. At last he found it was a question how near it was to All Souls' day; and then came an equally amazing query whether the gentleman's babe had been baptized; for it appeared that on All Souls' day the spirits of unchristened infants had the power of rising from the sands in a bewildering mist, and leading wayfarers into the sea. And the poor guide, white and drenched, vowed he never would have undertaken this walk if he had only thought of this. These slaughters of heretics must so much have augmented the number of the poor little spirits; and no doubt Monsieur would be specially bewildered by one so nearly concerned with him. Philip, half frightened, could not help stepping forward and pulling Berenger by the cloak to make him aware of this strange peril; but he did not get much comfort. "Baptized? Yes; you know she was, by the old nurse. Let me alone, I say. I would follow her wherever she called me, the innocent, and glad—the sooner the better."

And he shook his brother off with a sadness and impatience so utterly unapproachable, that Philip, poor boy, could only watch his tall figure in the wide cloak and slouched hat, stalking on ever more indistinct in the gloom, while his much confused mind tried to settle the theological point whether the old nurse's baptism were valid enough to prevent poor little Bérangère from becoming one of these mischievous deluders; and all this was varied by the notion of Captain Hobbs picking up their corpses on the beach, and of Sir Marmaduke bewailing his only son.

At last a strange muffled sound made him start in the dead silence, but the guide hailed the sound with a joyful cry—

"Hola! Blessings on Notre-Dame and holy Father Colom-

beau, now are we saved!" And on Philip's hasty interrogation, he explained that it was from the bells of Nissard, which the good priest always caused to be rung during these sea-fogs, to disperse all evil beings, and guide the wanderers.

The guide strode on manfully, as the sound became clearer and nearer, and Philip was infinitely relieved to be free from all supernatural anxieties, and to have merely to guard against the wiles of a Popish priest, a being almost as fabulously endowed in his imagination as poor little Bérangère's soul could be in that of the fisherman.

The drenching Atlantic mist had wetted them all to the skin, and closed round them so like a solid wall, that they had almost lost sight of each other, and had nothing but the bell's voices to comfort them, till quite suddenly there was a light upon the mist, a hazy reddish gleam—a window seemed close to them. The guide, heartily thanking Our Lady and St. Julian, knocked at a door, which opened at once into a warm, bright, superior sort of kitchen, where a neatly dressed elderly peasant woman exclaimed, "Welcome, poor souls! Enter, then. Here, good Father, are some bewildered creatures. Eh! wrecked are you, good folks, or lost in the fog?"

At the same moment there came from behind the screen that shut off the fire from the door, a benignant-looking, hale old man in a cassock, with long white hair on his shoulders, and a cheerful face, ruddy from sea-wind.

"Welcome, my friends," he said. "Thanks to the saints who have guided you safely. You are drenched. Come to the fire at once."

And as they moved on into the full light of the fire and the rude iron lamp by which he had been reading, and he saw the draggled plumes and other appurtenances that marked the two youths as gentlemen, he added, "Are you wrecked,

Messieurs? We will do our poor best for your accommodation;" and while both mechanically murmured a word of thanks, and removed their soaked hats, the good man exclaimed, as he beheld Berenger's ashy face, with the sunken eyes and deep scars, "Monsieur should come to bed at once. He is apparently recovering from a severe wound. This way, sir; Jolitte shall make you some hot tisane."

"Wait, sir," said Berenger, very slowly, and his voice sounding hollow from exhaustion; "they say that you can tell me of my child. Let me hear."

"Monsieur's child!" exclaimed the bewildered curate, looking from him to Philip, and then to the guide, who poured out a whole stream of explanation before Philip had arranged three words of French.

"You hear, sir," said Berenger, as the man finished: "I came hither to seek my wife, the Lady of Ribaumont."

"Eh!" exclaimed the *curé*, "do I then see M. le Marquis de Nid-de-Merle?"

"No!" cried Berenger; "no, I am not that *scélérat!* I am her true husband, the Baron de Ribaumont."

"The Baron de Ribaumont perished at the St. Bartholomew," said the *curé*, fixing his eyes on him, as though to confute an impostor.

"Ah, would that I had!" said Berenger. "I was barely saved with the life that is but misery now. I came to seek her—I found what you know. They told me that you saved the children. Ah, tell me where mine is?—all that is left me."

"A few poor babes I was permitted to rescue, but very few. But let me understand to whom I speak," he added, much perplexed. "You, sir——"

"I am her husband, married at five years old—contract renewed last year. It was he whom you call Nid-de-Merle

who fell on me, and left me for dead. A faithful servant saved my life, but I have lain sick in England till now, when her letter to my mother brought me to La Sablerie, to find—to find *this*. Oh, sir, have pity on me! Tell me if you know anything of her, or if you can give me her child?"

"The orphans I was able to save are—the boys at nurse here, the girls with the good nuns at Luçon," said the priest, with infinite pity in his look. "Should you know it, sir?"

"I would—I should," said Berenger. "But it is a girl. Ah, would that it were here! But you—you, sir—you know more than these fellows. Is there no—no hope of herself?"

"Alas! I fear I can give you none," said the priest; "but I will tell all I know; only I would fain see you eat, rest, and be dried."

"How can I?" gasped he, allowing himself, however, to sink into a chair; and the priest spoke:

"Perhaps you know, sir, that the poor Lady fled from her friends, and threw herself upon the Huguenots. All trace had been lost, when, at a banquet given by the mayor of Luçon, there appeared some *patisseries*, which some ecclesiastics, who had enjoyed the hospitality of Bellaise, recognised as peculiar to the convent there, where she had been brought up. They were presented to the mayor by his friend, Bailli la Grasse, who had boasted of the excellent *confitures* of the heretic pastor's daughter that lodged in the town of La Sablerie. The place was in disgrace for having afforded shelter and supplies to Montgomery's pirate crews, and there were narrations of outrages committed on Catholics. The army were enraged by their failure before La Rochelle; in effect, it was resolved to make an example, when, on M. de

Nid-de-Merle's summons, all knowledge of the Lady was denied. Is it possible that she was indeed not there?"

Berenger shook his head. "She was indeed there," he said, with an irrepressible groan. "Was there no mercy—none?"

"Ask not, sir," said the compassionate priest; "the flesh shrinks, though there may be righteous justice. A pillaged town, when men are enraged, is like a place of devils unchained. I reached it only after it had been taken by assault, when all was flame and blood. Ask me no more; it would be worse for you to hear, than me to tell," he concluded, shuddering, but laying his hand kindly on Berenger's arm. "At least it is ended now, and God is more merciful than men. Many died by the bombs cast into the city, and she for whom you ask certainly fell not alive into the hands of those who sought her. Take comfort, sir; there is One who watches and takes count of our griefs. Sir," turning to Philip, "this gentleman is too much spent with sorrow to bear this cold and damp. Aid me, I entreat, to persuade him to lie down."

Philip understood the priest's French far better than that of the peasants, and added persuasions that Berenger was far too much exhausted and stunned to resist. To spend a night in a Popish priest's house would once have seemed to Philip a shocking alternative, yet here he was, heartily assisting in removing the wet garments in which his brother had sat only too long, and was heartily relieved to lay him down in the priest's own bed, even though there was an image over the head, which, indeed, the boy never saw. He only saw his brother turn away from the light with a low, heavy moan, as if he would fain be left alone with his sorrow and his crushed hopes.

Nothing could be kinder than Dom Colombeau, the priest

of Nissard. He saw to the whole of his guests being put into some sort of dry habiliments before they sat round his table to eat of the savoury mess in the great *pot-au-feu*, which had, since their arrival, received additional ingredients, and moreover sundry villagers had crept into the house. Whenever the good Father supped at home, any of his flock were welcome to drop in to enjoy his hospitality. After a cup of hot cider round, they carried off the fisherman to lodge in one of their cottages. Shake-downs were found for the others, and Philip, wondering what was to become of the good host himself, gathered that he meant to spend such part of the night on the kitchen floor as he did not pass in prayer in the church for the poor young gentleman, who was in such affliction. Philip was not certain whether to resent this as an impertinence or an attack on their Protestant principles; but he was not sure, either that the priest was aware what was their religion, and was still less certain of his own comprehension of these pious intentions: he decided that, any way, it was better not to make a fool of himself. Still, the notion of the mischievousness of priests was so rooted in his head, that he consulted Humfrey on the expedience of keeping watch all night, but was sagaciously answered that "these French rogues don't do any hurt unless they be brought up to it, and the place was as safe as old Hurst."

In fact, Philip's vigilance would have been strongly against nature. He never awoke till full daylight and morning sun were streaming through the vine-leaves round the window, and then, to his dismay, he saw that Berenger had left his bed, and was gone. Suspicions of foul play coming over him in full force as he gazed round on much that he considered as "Popish furniture," he threw on his clothes, and hastened to open the door, when, to his great relief, he saw

Berenger hastily writing at a table under the window, and Smithers standing by waiting for the billet.

"I am sending Smithers on board, to ask Hobbs to bring our cloak bags," said Berenger, as his brother entered. "We must go on to Luçon."

He spoke briefly and decidedly, and Philip was satisfied to see him quite calm and collected—white indeed, and with the old haggard look, and the great scar very purple instead of red, which was always a bad sign with him. He was not disposed to answer questions; he shortly said, "He had slept not less than usual," which Philip knew meant very little; and he had evidently made up his mind, and was resolved not to let himself give way. If his beacon of hope had been so suddenly, frightfully quenched, he still was kept from utter darkness by straining his eyes and forcing his steps to follow the tiny, flickering spark that remained.

The priest was at his morning mass; and so soon as Berenger had given his note to Smithers, and sent him off with a fisherman to the *Throstle*, he took up his hat, and went out upon the beach, that lay glistening in the morning sun, then turned straight towards the tall spire of the church, which had been their last night's guide. Philip caught his cloak.

"You are never going there, Berenger?"

"Vex me not now," was all the reply he got. "There the dead and living meet together."

"But, brother, they will take you for one of their own sort."

"Let them."

Philip was right that it was neither a prudent nor consistent proceeding, but Berenger had little power of reflection, and his impulse at present bore him into the church belonging to his native faith and land, without any defined feeling, save

that it was peace to kneel there among the scattered worshippers, who came and went with their fish-baskets in their hands, and to hear the low chant of the priest and his assistant from within the screen.

Philip meantime marched up and down outside in much annoyance, until the priest and his brother came out, when the first thing he heard the good Colombeau say was, "I would have called upon you before, my son, but that I feared you were a Huguenot."

"I am an English Protestant," said Berenger; "but, ah! sir, I needed comfort too much to stay away from prayer."

Père Colombeau looked at him in perplexity, thinking perhaps that here might be a promising convert, if there were only time to work on him; but Berenger quitted the subject at once, asking the distance to Luçon.

"A full day's journey," answered Père Colombeau, and added, "I am sorry you are indeed a Huguenot. It was what I feared last night, but I feared to add to your grief. The nuns are not permitted to deliver up children to Huguenot relations."

"I am her father!" exclaimed Berenger, indignantly.

"That goes for nothing, according to the rules of the Church," said the priest. "The Church cannot yield her children to heresy."

"But we in England are not Calvinists," cried Berenger. "We are not like your Huguenots."

"The Church would make no difference," said the priest. "Stay, sir," as Berenger struck his own forehead, and was about to utter a fierce invective. "Remember that if your child lives, it is owing to the pity of the good nuns. You seem not far from the bosom of the Church. Did you but return——"

"It is vain to speak of that," said Berenger, quickly. "Say, sir, would an order from the King avail to open these doors?"

"Of course it would, if you have the influence to obtain one."

"I have, I have," cried Berenger, eagerly. "The King has been my good friend already. Moreover, my English grandfather will deal with the Queen. The heiress of our house cannot be left in a foreign nunnery. Say, sir," he added, turning to the priest, "if I went to Luçon at once, would they answer me and let me see my child?"

The priest considered a moment, and answered, "No, sir, I think not. The Prioress is a holy woman, very strict, and with a horror of heretics. She came from the convent of Bellaise, and would therefore at once know your name, and refuse all dealings with you."

"She could not do so, if I brought an order from the King."

"Certainly not."

"Then to Paris!" And laying his hand on Philip's shoulder, he asked the boy whether he had understood, and explained that he must go at once to Paris—riding post—and obtain the order from the King.

"To Paris — to be murdered again!" said Philip, in dismay.

"They do not spend their time there in murder," said Berenger. "And now is the time, while the savage villain Narcisse is with his master in Poland. I cannot but go, Philip; we both waste words. You shall take home a letter to my Lord."

"I—I go not home without you," said Philip, doggedly.

"I cannot take you, Phil; I have no warrant."

"I have warrant for going, though. My father said he

was easier about you with me at your side. Where you go, I go."

The brothers understood each other's ways so well, that Berenger knew the intonation in Philip's voice that meant that nothing should make him give way. He persuaded no more, only took measures for the journey, in which the kind priest gave him friendly advice. There was no doubt that the good man pitied him sincerely, and wished him success more than perhaps he strictly ought to have done, unless as a possible convert. Of money for the journey there was no lack, for Berenger had brought a considerable sum, intending to reward all who had befriended Eustacie, as well as to fit her out for the voyage; and this, perhaps, with his papers, he had brought ashore to facilitate his entrance into La Sablerie,—that entrance which, alas! he had found only too easy. He had therefore only to obtain horses and a guide, and this could be done at La Motte-Achard, where the party could easily be guided on foot, or conveyed in a boat if the fog should not set in again, but all the coast-line of Nissard was dangerous in autumn and winter; nay, even this very August an old man, with his daughter, her infant, and a donkey, had been found bewildered between the creeks on a sandbank, where they stood still and patient, like a picture of the Flight into Egypt, when an old fisherman found them, and brought them to the beneficent shelter of the Presbytère.

Stories of this kind were told at the meal that was something partaking of the nature of both breakfast and early dinner, but where Berenger ate little and spoke less. Philip watched him anxiously; the boy thought the journey a perilous experiment every way, but, boyishly, was resolved neither to own his fears of it nor to leave his brother. External perils he was quite ready to face, and he fancied that

his English birth would give him some power of protecting Berenger, but he was more reasonably in dread of the present shock bringing on such an illness as the last relapse; and if Berenger lost his senses again, what should they do? He even ventured to hint at this danger, but Berenger answered, "That will scarce happen again. My head is stronger now. Besides, it was doing nothing, and hearing her truth profaned, that crazed me. No one at least will do that again. But if you wish to drive me frantic again, the way would be to let Hobbs carry me home without seeking her child."

Philip bore this in mind when, with flood-tide, Master Hobbs landed, and showed himself utterly dismayed at the turn affairs had taken. He saw the needlessness of going to Luçon without royal authority; indeed, he thought it possible that the very application there might give the alarm, and cause all tokens of the child's identity to be destroyed, in order to save her from her heretic relations. But he did not at all approve of the young gentlemen going off to Paris at once. It was against his orders. He felt bound to take them home as he had brought them, and they might then make a fresh start if it so pleased them; but how could he return to my Lord and Sir Duke without them? "Mr. Ribaumont might be right—it was not for him to say a father ought not to look after his child—yet he was but a stripling himself, and my Lord had said, 'Master Hobbs, I trust him to you.'" He would clearly have liked to have called in a boat's crew, mastered the young gentlemen, and carried them on board as captives; but as this was out of his power, he was obliged to yield the point. He disconsolately accepted the letters in which Berenger had explained all, and in which he promised to go at once to Sir Francis Walsingham's at Paris, to run into no needless danger, and to watch carefully over Philip; and craved pardon, in a respectful but

yet manly and determined tone, for placing his duty to his lost, deserted child above his submission to his grandfather. Then engaging to look out for a signal on the coast if he should sail to Bordeaux in January, to touch and take the passengers off, Captain Hobbs took leave, and the brothers were left to their own resources.

END OF VOL. I.

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